The Nigerian Folk Culture in the 21st Century: A Case Study Of Gunnuvi Community

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Abstract
This paper examines the situation of folk culture as an aspect of folklores in Gunnuvi community which is found in parts of Lagos, Ogun, Kwara Oyo states. Folktales are basically in group with others like; proverbs, riddles and songs. The study endeavours to look into the situation of folktales in the above communities to see: what the situation of folktales, in the past and what has become of it in this dispensation? The paper equally considers the implications of the abandonment of this beautiful and educative culture then finally, makes some recommendations that would help to redeem the deplorable situation and preserve this culture for oncoming generation.

Introduction
All Nigerian societies and the rest of the world are endowed with some beautiful and didactic cultures and traditions. These allow mutual, cordial and peaceful co-existence among members of the communities. Some of the events in the communities are usually meant for relaxation, entertainment and enjoyment of the members and they are usually carried out after a hard working periods. These can include various festivals, ceremonies, some of which are done periodically, almost daily, annually, or as the situation demands. Egun people of Nigeria and beyond are not left out because they have their several activities lined up for making living balanced. This study is to decry the situation of the loss of some of these cultural and traditional practices which had been from time in memorial. It is also to discuss the implication and consequences of this unprecedented happening that erode our cultural and traditional values.

Objectives of the Study
The study is meant to examine the situation of folktales in Gunnuvi community before and now to know what has become of them in this dispensation and suggest ways out. The following are the areas to discuss:
1. The folktales situation in the past
2. The situation in this dispensation
3. Then the needed recommendations for its survival.

Folktales
This can be regarded as traditional stories that are passed orally from generation to generation. They are usually meant to inculcate moral lessons into the lives of the younger generation. These stories are at times imaginary or perhaps philosophised by the elders of a given community in order to put in place some didactic morals that are transferable from generation to generation. They are fused in norms, beliefs, cultures and traditions of the community to
preserve them for eternity. This definition may sound very simple; however it is good to further explain this term intensively. The Collaborative International Dictionary [http://www.ibiblio.org/webster-Worldnet1.5 (1993) defines folktales as: Tales, legends, or superstitions among the people; the unwritten literature of culture, such as stories, proverbs, riddles and songs. Folktales are one of the aspects of folklores which deal with stories.

**Features of Folktales**
Folktales are usually different from any other stories because they are mostly based on animals’ characters living as human beings.

1. Such animals familiar to mankind like; the dog which is common to all African communities, the tortoise is dominantly used as a character among the Yoruba and egun, eagle, chicken, hawk, lion are generally used by all other communities in Africa while, spider is commonly used among the Ewe and Ghanaians, parrot it is commonly used by the Hausa, in their stories. At times the stories always are presented in animals’ setting about their kingdom.

2. Another feature of the stories which occurs at the end of the story, must teach moral lessons, because it is meant for didactic reasons.

3. It is always narrated by an aged person with exemplary character and respected in the community.

4. It is usually very simple and not too long in form so that it will not bore the children.

5. It is at times accompanied with a traditional songs pointing to the theme and moral lesson contained in the storyline. The story teller leads while the children take the chorus at times with clapping of hands. Sometimes the children catching fun may be allowed to exhibit their dancing steps. Meanwhile the story teller controls the children to maintain decorum /discipline.

6. There is also the use of fairies which means that the stories are imaginary based on the cultural and traditional values of the community.

**When are Folktales Told?**
Folktales are usually meant for very cool and dry season, especially after harvests because of the conduciveness of the weather. Secondly, they are usually enjoyed under the moonlight. In those days, folktales were usually told in the evening after diner. They served as a means of relaxation after a hard day’s work and after evening meal. The children were not expected to go to bed immediately, they needed some time to relax and entertain themselves before doing so. It was a fun catching moment for the younger ones. At times the children usually sat in form of semi-circle facing the story teller or better still settled down in rectangular form facing the elder who narrated the story to them. In some situations, grand-parents played such roles.

**Where are Folktales Told?**
These activities sometimes took place in a large compound which could accommodate a large number of children. Better still, it may be in the village square where there is enough space. Mats are usually spread on the ground for the children to sit. The excitement and the newness of each storyline prevents the audience from sleeping because they do not want to miss any action.

**The Importance of Folktales**

No community in the whole world that doesn’t have folktales in their cultures and traditions like the Gunnuvi community. It is important for us to quickly glance at the usefulness of folktales before plunging into the main focus of this research. Asamu (2015: 25) mentions the approach of symbolic interactionalism which is linked with understanding the relationship between man and society. This notion is basically stating that human action and interaction are understandable only through exchange of meaningful communication or symbols. He further clarifies the truth that man’ while animals only respond to stimulus, while human beings have the ability to interrupt the process.

Based on this fact, it is obvious that members of a community interact and relate with one another, therefore there is need to build and shape up community members in order for them to cohabit mutually, peacefully and cordially. This meaningful communication can only be seen from the way Africans and other communities in the world nurture their young ones to suit the norms and other values in their different environments. Therefore, in African set up folktales are one of the prominent media through which the younger generation could be well taught the values of life so that they will become responsible adults to carry out societal activities. These are some of the importance of folktales in a community:

1. They teach moral lessons culturally and traditionally.
2. They build up positive characters in the young ones.
3. The young generation learns to live responsibly.
4. They help to preserve the cultures and traditions of communities.
5. They serve as means of entertainment and relaxation after hard working periods.
6. They promote mutual and peaceful relationships among community members.
7. They create the ability to reason and debate in order to bring their various opinions as they interact and deliberate on the storyline.
8. They absorb the stories till they also become adults and agents of cultural transference.
9. The children are also used to preserve the oral tradition and cultural knowledge of the community.
10. The stories make them to keep away from evil, avoiding the consequences of bad behaviour.

**Gunuvi Community and Folktales**

The Gununvi community is found in the south-western of Nigeria. Egun people occupy the border areas of the ancient and historic town Badagry, Makoko, Marooko and its environs of Lagos state. The community spreads across Ogun state covering Ipokia Local Government Area, Yewa Ilaro, Ado-Odo, Alágbá, and Sango down to Ayetoro not far from Abeokuta. Tonuewa (2015) states further that egun people are also found in some parts of Oyo and Kwara.
states all along the Nigeria- Benin boundaries. He further informs us of the fact that due to the effects of Trans-Atlantic slave trade between the 15th and 19th centuries, before these illicit and inhuman commercial activities were finally abolished because of the European industrialisation that prevented the use of human labour, consequently egun people are also found on Caribbean islands, Haiti, Brazil. The presence of Egun is found in Benin Republic, Togo, and Ghana and the Côte d’Ivoire.

Egun people’s culture and tradition are much more similar to those of the Yoruba. Owing to the fact that all the communities within the West African sub-region were dominated by the old Oyo Empire, the Dahomey kingdom and the Ashanti of Ghana. Historically, the proliferation of the Yoruba culture and tradition in this region was due to the political problems the old Oyo empire had and most of its people then migrated and spread through the West Africa sub-region where they settled.

Among the periodical celebration and observation of some festivals of the Gunnivi people are: Zangbeto- masquerades, Àgbóñkè- coconut festival, Agbaja, Ageso- youth festival, naming ceremonies, marriage, and burial, folktales, and moonlight games, among others. The Heviòso-the god of thunder which is popularly called Sango in Yoruba.

The Folktales in Gunnivi Community

The fact was made known by one of the elders of Ipokia, Bishop Koko states that Gunnivi people’s culture and tradition are very similar to those of Yoruba. From time immemorial even before the coming of the Europeans and their culture and civilization, folktales in Gunnivi community were in existence. This continued even till towards the 19th century. It was however discovered that this tradition of folktales is one of the most practiced of all, due to its importance as already mentioned above. The fact is that no community would want to raise children of no good moral standard. Gunnivi people also value good moral and as such, always make efforts to make sure that their posterities have the qualities and morals it takes to be future responsible community leaders and dwellers who would keep the culture alive forever from generation to generation.

The evenings of Gunnivi children were always full of activities that would inculcate good moral behaviour in them. That is the more reason why the story teller must be someone who has a credible behaviour in the community. Good character is the treasure of mankind. He or she must be a role model without any questionable character. He must also love the cultures and tradition of his community so he can passionately transfer the norms into the younger generation. Story telling period is what no child in Gunnvi community would want to miss in those days.

Most of the folktales in Gunnivi community are dominated by a major character, the tortoise called “kklo” in ogu. These folktales are centred on its cunny nature; laziness, tricks’, lies, selfishness, theft as well as its sluggishness yet acts in a smart and dubious ways. The nature and characteristics of this animal qualifies it to be used in such folktales in order to educate and prevent the younger generation from behaving in the same manner. The pattern of its shell is
usually used in stories to show the children that its deceptive character made it to break its shell, though that is the way the Mother Nature has designed it. Showing fact, the consequences of the action of individual children and adults is to avoid such bad behaviour and craftiness.

Apart from this, the tortoise always takes other animals as fools, by considering himself, to be smarter, intelligent and wiser which usually lands him into a great problem. The tortoise is also considered to be arrogant and people always avoid him in order not to be a victim of its own traps, yet he would never learn his lesson. This simply confirms the saying of the elders that the evil men do falls on them. This makes it clear that there is the law of Karma whereby what one sows one would reap. No one among the adults or the children would ever want to associate oneself with any one with such ill characters.

**The Present Situation of Folktales in Gunnuvi Community**

It has been discovered that Western education has really penetrated into the new generation and most cultural and traditional norms and values getting eroded. Anything that has to do with Africa indigenous languages is no longer fascinating at all. Even efforts of the government through The Nigeria Television Authority NTA, in the 80s by introducing tales by moonlight, lasted for two or three decades, things began to change after that period, children tend to be more interested in foreign cartoons rather than watching story telling programs that will inculcate good morals into them. Even in the rural set up, youths have diverted their attention towards modernisation and forsaking our cultural heritage which is our identity. These attitudes are consequential and something needed to be done to save the situation before we lose our cultural heritage and identity. Most youth no longer reckoned with such tradition for to them it is no longer relevant with the scientific and technological development in our modern days. A river that forgets its source shall definitely dry up. Toby (1957) as quoted by Arisukwu (2015) debated the fact that:

> The uncommitted adolescent is a candidate for “gang socialisation. Acknowledging gang socialisation as part of casual, motivational dynamic leading to delinquency, but introduced the concept of the stake in conformity” to explain “candidacy” for such learning experiences… but the young who had few stakes or investments in conformity were more likely to be drawn into gang activity.

The communal moral values that are needed to be instigated into the young ones at early stage till adulthood had been neglected. Training of children in those days used to be a communal effort, but these days the reverse is the case.

Some of these cultural heritages plays such a major role fashioning and tutoring the children towards living responsibly in the community and also make constructive contributions towards its development. Unfortunately, most children are morally bankrupt due to the abandonment of folktales culture which serves as solid societal norms of raising responsible future leaders in a community.
Gunnuvi youth like any other youths of the world in this dispensation are the most fortunate yet are full of great weakness, because they have embraced foreign culture at the expense of their beautiful and valuable cultural heritage. Even the Christian, Islam and traditional religions emphasise the fact that a child needs to be properly trained in the ways he or she ought to go and when he/she grows up he/she will make the parents proud. The giving of rest here, simply denote living responsibly of such child when become an adult.

The importance of folktales has already been enumerated above and the roles they play in the building up of children in the past decades cannot be over emphasised. The negligence of these folktales cultural heritage by the Gunnuvi had left the training of children to the individual parents and these jeopardies the morals and the proper upbringing of the children in the Gunnuvi community. This act of individuality contradicts the Nigerian community principles and beliefs that training of children is a communal responsibility. This is consequently glaring in the manifestation of juvenile delinquency that has become rampant in our community. Moral decadence and disrespectfulness of future community leaders and other misconducts show that for us to raise responsible leaders who will continue to promote and preserve our cultural heritage, something urgent needs to be done if not the future of Gunnuvi community will be at jeopardy and possibly vanish within some space of time.

**Recommendations**

It should be noted that something urgent needs to be done to save the situation. The following recommendations are prescribed to the Gunnuvi communities most especially the elders and the youth for the revival of its glorious cultural heritage.

- The first of it all is to create the awareness and educate the young generation that such practice exists from time immemorial and its values are passed across to the youth.
- This should also be part of the school curriculum from the primary and secondary.
- Heads of the various families can take it as a duty to revive this culture in their families.
- Town Chiefs can equally work towards re-communalising the culture in more interesting ways by modernizing it.
- Some of these folktales can be printed and properly documented for reasons of preservation so that this beautiful culture will not go down the drain.
- Efforts should be made by the Gunnuvi elites and scholars to document most of these tales in black and white in English followed by Ogu and any other language.
- By so doing, individuals will easily access these stories at their own convenience and read them and learn moral lessons from them; in so doing this culture will be kept alive from generation to generation. For Comte (1798-1857) as mentioned by Faloore (2015) the French philosopher developed the ideology of positivism and the researcher continues his argument that it was at that time the French revolution came up so that Comte was only reacting to those events. To him human activities were too critical and destructive of old traditional institutions, especially religion. The positivism was meant to counter the negativism of metaphysic. So a point positioned the aim of the goal of knowledge is regarded as the phenomenon of our experience. That the knowledge beyond experience acquired of anything is considered impossible. Therefore at this juncture, we would say since the folktales are strongly based on the past experiences in relation to culture and tradition of the early settlers of a particular
community the stories were being orally documented for the younger generation to learn from so that they would not be vulnerable to social misconducts.

Semasir (2011) raised an alarm concerning the dying of Ogu language while Hunjo (2014) opined that Ogu language is struggling to survive. This situation is due to the neglect of the culture and tradition of the Gunnuvi community. When a language’s cultural and traditional practices and values are done away with such a language fades away gradually over a period of time. This simply implies that Ogu language has to be reckoned with in order to keep the language alive. Ogu culture and tradition have to be held in high esteem to make the language survive. This means the younger generation of Ogu community must rekindle their love and passion for their cultural and traditional heritage and values of which folktales are. This will help them save the cultures, traditions with the values. The speaking of Ogu will be enhanced when folktales as one of the aspects of folklores is encouraged. Keep the culture and tradition so that the language will live, otherwise Ogu language will be completely extinct out among the Nigerian minor languages in the nearest future.

**Conclusion**

This study has examined the folktales generally in Africa, then in the Gunnuvi community. The features and the importance were also clearly stated. The study makes us to understand that they served as means of inculcating morals into the life of the younger ones in the community. It also highlights the consequences of not keeping the culture alive. Among such are the moral bankrupt and juvenile delinquencies among the youth in Gunnuvi community. The study also recommended the need for documentation of the stories as the most paramount point mentioned, as such move will preserve the from generation to generation.
Works cited


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