

**ROLE PLAYED BY GIRL CHARACTERS IN SEPEDI FOLKTALES**

By

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## Declaration

I, **NLORO CHARLOTTE SEBONI**, hereby declare that this mini-dissertation submitted to the University of Limpopo for the Degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** has never been previously submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, that this is my own work in design and execution and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1. BACKGROUND AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

In many folktale studies, the study of girls receives less attention. Instead focus is on aspects such as structure, the role of the children or even comparison of the folktales in terms of the impact they have on the lives of the people who produce such texts (Makgamatha, 1990; Mofokeng, 1951; and Pottow 1992). These authors are also concerned with the subject matter of the tales. It is the intention of this study therefore to look into one grey area for research which seems neglected, that is, the common role played by girls in the folktales especially in Sepedi folktales.

In many societies folktales are used as instruments to mould character, shape views and opinion about life. The girl child looks up to these folktales characters as a mirror of her life, and does not want to fail her parents by treading a less travelled road, or venturing into the unknown, or unsettling the status quo. In the study of folktales, one realise that each folklorist has a different understanding of folktales and what they are used for in our life. It is evident that many folklorists assume various positions as regards the value of folktales, as well as how they are used to shape social conduct and behaviour.

According to Makgamatha (1990:1 folktales are sometimes used to educate or frighten the children and teach them to obey the instructions from elderly people. African languages use similar characters orb their archetypes in the folktales. They also have a tendency to drive home their norms and values of propriety through narratives characters whose roles are similar. The narratives will have different animals that are employed and yet depending on the social organization of such a society that produce the tales.

If we look at the folktale entitled *Nonyana senyamaswi* (The bird which secretes

milk) we realise that this folktale is found in almost all Sesotho languages. In his classification and comparison of Sotho folktales, (Mofokeng: 1951) observes that most of the folktales in this language group are similar and also teach the same lesson. He also discovered that it is a common practice among these language groups to tell the tales in the evenings when all people had retired from their daily labour and chores, so that children can receive the necessary attention. The folktales are part of the leisure and thus told when everybody is at rest. Many taboos and restrictions are set to control the telling of the tales during the day and as such there is a widespread belief that folktales are only evening stories. These taboos are instruments to admonish laxity and laziness, thus ensuring that community members can focus on their routine chores before engaging in storytelling.

De Bruin (2002:1) is of the opinion that children are the main audience or readers of folktales. In fact, one can go on so far to claim that folktales are formulated for children in all cultures, and are employed to entertain, educate, warm and inspire the children.

Although folktales are meant for all children, girls are the focal point of every storyteller since the general belief is that when a woman is brought up correctly, her family as well is much at an advantage because she will get married, which is an added bonus. The culture of folktales in patriarchal societies affords men a higher status in the society. Whereas women are expected to accept their inferiority position in order to be regarded as a real woman who respects the world of man. One wonders whether this practice which was cherished many centuries ago, may still be a priority or it will be difficult for today's generation to uphold these cultural belief. Our new generation is most absorbed in what the media teaches through radio, newspapers, magazines and what they learn at school.

Lenin (1962:19) maintains that in every society the folktales contain elements of reality whereby customs, morals and social relations are reflected. This means

that folktales are used by people of all races to achieve one common goal, that is; to educate. Men are also part of the audience who partake in storytelling but they are not as good as women, especially the elderly women because they have much experience of events which come and go, therefore what they say is not far from reality in life. Makgamatha (1987:19)

acknowledges this when he says that most of the people he interviewed were women, and the older they are, the more reality prepared they are to tell nonwane.

Nqcanqca (1987:10) concurs with Makgamatha when he reports that narration of the folktales is to a larger extent entrusted in older women and it is for this reason that they are looked upon as custodians and transmitters of tradition norms. Having sketched the necessary background unto the role of story-telling, and how stories mould character, it is necessary to foreground what the confine of the study shall be. In this study the researcher investigates the way girls are represented in the Sepedi folktales, and also looks into the cultural background of these girls.

The study further establishes why the society feels that the girls are the ones who should be more obedient and why so much attention is given to their upbringing than it is the case with the boys. De Bruin (2002: 84) stresses this point when he says that boys are taught not to be found in the company of men while girls are expected to be in the company of their mothers.

## **1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

This study aims to analyze and critique the portraiture of girls in the Sepedi folktales. This is achieved through the following:

- Examining how girls respond to situations and contexts that confront them: and
- Contextualizing girl's behaviour and conduct within the failures that

produce them as textual products.

### **1.3 Research questions**

- How are girls represented and portrayed in the Sepedi folktales?
- In what way are folktales used to construct roles?
- How does the society manage to socialize girls into future women who will respect the man's world.

### **1.4 ASSUMPTIONS**

This research is based on the assumption that the society uses folktales to socialize girls to accept the expectations of a future woman who is destined to show respect of the male order and norms and the male dominated world and as such, the roles assumed by boys and girls in these tales are radically different.

### **1.5. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS**

#### **1.5.1. Folktale**

A folktale is a traditional story, which is handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth either told to amuse or entertain, and it has no virtue of originality. It also provides a look into a culture's customs and morals and helps to transfer historical and cultural knowledge to younger generations. Peek and Yankah (2004:109) agree that a folktale is one of the earliest forms of lullabies, which adults perform to their children in their earliest years. They are performed during the winter and in the early hours of the evening because there is a belief that whoever performs such as songs, jokes and riddles such a person will grow some horns. Folktales are an important medium of socializing the children because these tales not only serve for entertainment but also incorporate other folklore forms which forms part of their culture.

Rananga (1997:18) quotes Bascom who explains that a folktale is a prose narrative which is regarded as fiction. This definition is an adaptation of the famous Bascom's taxonomy of tales which proclaims that folktales are fictional, and as such may not be considered as dogma or history although they may or may not have happened and that, they are not to be taken seriously. Nevertheless, even though they are always told for amusement, they have other important functions as the class of moral folktales should be suggested.

According to Funk and Wagnall's (1972:66) the word "folktale" refers to all kinds of traditions narratives. This is the case with the German Märchen, and in the Sepedi *Nonwane*. Its feature is that it is traditional and it handed down from one person to another and there is no virtue of originality. This tradition may be purely oral. The tale is heard and repeated as it is remembered with or without changes or additions may be made by the new teller. Sometimes the traditions may be literary, as when the story keeps being told by one after the other. Canonici (1996:66-67) believes that folktale is the storehouse of knowledge and wisdom, as its body contains the collective memories of a nation. Therefore, although its generally accepted function is entertainment, it is also performed in imbue the audience within the value system and the body of knowledge possessed and treasured by society. The stories represent the way the people explain reality to themselves and in some cases where they cannot actually express themselves in actual words. They use folktales to sing their goals to the intended group. This idea is supported by Dlamini (1995) when he speaks about the Swazi women that when they are not happy in their marriage, they express their dissatisfaction through a song. This means that they may not go around telling people about their home situations but the song will say it all.

### **1.5.2 Character**

A character is person in the story who may be defined according to his actions and what he says. A character is differentiated from others through his attributes,

trades and abilities. Sometimes a person's character may be disclosed through the way he talks and his dependability. Wordsmith (1999:199) says a character refers to the peculiar moral and behavioral quality that identifies the animal, object or the person in the poem. Every character has some negative and positive aspects. Negative may include arrogance; disobedience and selfishness while positive include cooperation, humility and love.

Miruka and Keteipa (1990:81) define character in folktale as the combination of qualities or features that distinguish one person or thing from another. Reimud (1992:19) maintains that character it is a person, animal or object featuring in a plot and interact with one another within the established setting. It may also be described as the peculiar and behavioral quality that identifies the animal or object in a tale. A Character may be revealed in a variety of ways depending on the narrative viewpoint adopted by the author.

### **1.5.3 Folklore**

Folklore is a literary phenomenon whereby all humanities like ethnography, history or even history of literature cannot be separated from. As a national property, it has some devices such as repetition and parallelism. Folklore works does not have an author; it arises from everywhere and changes in a regular way, independently of people's will once there are appropriate conditions for it in historical development of people. Rananga (1997:1) explains that folklore or folk literature comprises the unrecorded traditional knowledge and beliefs of cultures and is by definition, transmitted verbatim. It includes both the form and the content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person.

The *World Book Encyclopedia* (1982:24) says much folklore consists of folk stories such as ballads, fairytales, legends and myths. Folklore also includes arts and crafts, dances, games, nursery rhymes, proverbs, songs, superstitions and religious celebrations. Masuku (2005:7) holds that the oral nature of folklore implies that in the performance of some of the genres, like folktales and praises,

there is an audience that will observe. The performer's voice, gestures, body movements and facial expressions form part of the devices to manipulate the social situation and convey the message. The performer should be someone who is creative and flexible in his/her performance since he/she has to take into consideration the type of audience he/she is addressing.

## **1.6. DELIMITATION OF THE SCOPE**

The research focuses on Sepedi folktales but there will be other supporting inputs from other African languages as well. These references are done for comparative purposes to bring out the similarities on how girls are brought up. The chapters are outlined as follows:

Chapter 1 gives the outlines of the main problem which prompted the researcher to concentrate on this study and to bring about all the issues which was neglected about the girls.

In Chapter 2, that's where many folklorists are studied to find out how they present their understanding of folktales. Every author is carefully analyzed and compared with others to discover if they have similar opinions about folktales in terms of characters, setting, goals and language used.

Chapters 3 and 4 are both used to identify the girls spoken about. Although Chapter 3 slightly starts by detailing the socio-cultural background of these girls, finally it gives us the nature of folktales and why they are important in every society. In Chapter 4, it is whereby we are told of the nature of folktale girls as opposed to natural girls who are not part of the folktales.

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

This study is purely qualitative in nature, thus will rely on qualitative techniques for observation and analysis. The sampling methods will also help to select the documents systematically for inclusion in this paper. The data collection involves setting of standard by collecting information through interviews, observations

documents and visual materials. Although interviews will be conducted, the number of people to be interviewed is undetermined because it will depend on the number of referrals.

### **1.7.1 Selection of tales**

Although folktales in Sepedi are numerous, the researcher will concentrate on folktales which deal with girls than women. Such folktales deal particularly with marriage, behaviour, towards strangers and respect. They have been selected according to the way they portray girl characters and what it takes to be a good and acceptable bride and how these girls accept their responsibilities in polygamous marriage.

### **1.7.2 Data analysis**

The researcher shall conduct data analysis simultaneously with data collection, interpretation and narrative reporting and writing. All people interviewed have been recorded against their information, ages and areas of abode for future references.

## **1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is shaped by feminist ideology and critical idioms. Here under is a brief description of the Feminist approach which his applied to the text under discussion.

### **1.8.1 Feminism**

Feminism is a stage where women are dominated by men in their lives and they are controlled from childhood until old age. Actually, they never belong anywhere there's no one to listen to their voice. This theory is not directed-to a specific group but it is an international issue where women must just understand that their male counterparts are above them and they are therefore minors who should abide by laws as laid down by men. It does not matter whether a woman is married or not. If she is unmarried and have children, those children will be

controlled by the uncles and other next of kin male persons. This theory further says that women will not be able to discuss the bride price of their daughters, rather, the grandfathers and uncles will take control. Some feminists such as Marilyn Friedman, makes it clear in her argument that cultural practices that violate women's rights are nevertheless permissible if the women in question accept them. In this case, we may say that this researcher did not consider that it is not a matter of choice for women but is an issue of do or die.

When Masenya (2003:27) explains how she sees this theory, she maintains that the existing relative between the sexes in which women are subordinates to men are not satisfactory and ought to be changed. She further says that the theory aims at changing the world, transforming the relations between women and men so that all people can have a more equal chance of fulfilling their human potential. According to Gerda (1990:1-2), Feminism refers to a movement which seeks to change for the better justice for women and also it means doctrine of social and political rights, an organization for working for those rights and the recognition of long term social change.

Masuku (1997:24) in her analysis of this feminism theory, she understands it as a struggle between husband and wife, brother and sister and father and mother. She maintains that Feminism is therefore a struggle to end sexist oppression and aims not at benefiting women or any specific race or class of people. It is a movement that has the power to transform the whole society in a meaningful way. It challenges the "patriarchal" idea of male and female roles in the society. It also draws the distinction between sex and gender in order to redefine male and female roles. It is believed that women are full human beings, capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities such as political, social and sexual roles as well. She further says it encompasses major areas. The inferior economic status of women and issues as associated with women's poverty such as educational opportunities industrial development and other issues. Political rights of women such as right of assembly, travelling in public, office holding and basic human rights violations against women such as rape and

torture, form an area of concern. Another area of global concern encompasses marital and family issues such as marriage and divorce laws and domestic labour. This theory finds varying expressions in different regions of the world and among diverse populations.

According to Phillip (1987:68) in Masuku, he believes that feminism is the need for women to decide her own destiny, freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into actions. Feminism demands the acceptance of women's rights to individual conscience and judgment. It says that women's essential worth stems from her common humanity and does not depend on another relationship of her life.

### **1.8.2 Feminist theory**

Even if this theory is objective, logical, task oriented and instrumental, some researchers still feel that it reflects a male emphasis on individual competition, on dominating and controlling the environment and on the hard facts and forces that act on the world. On the other hand, women emphasize accommodation and gradually they wish to be accommodated by their partners as people who are able to make sound changes to the existing system of the universe. This theory attempts to give a voice to women, it also attempts to free and correct the male-oriented perspective that has predominated the social construction of gender. The traditional researcher would say that a family has a problem of unemployment only when an adult male in it cannot find a stable work while such a problem for women in the family is not considered an equally a family problem. It is the need for a change, need for action where women should be allowed their rightful positions as leaders where they qualify. Both men and women should agree in power sharing without the other one feeling inferior, oppressed and forced to obey because of sex or gender. Well, some women still feel embarrassed to be associated with the world of man, not because they really do not want to hold such positions, but because of cultural beliefs that a man should always be above as head of the family. Such women fear that if what they

advocate for does not take off as expected, it goes back to the fact that women are not capable to rule or make laws.

Neumann (1997:80) argues that much non-feminist research is sexist as a result of broader cultural beliefs and a preponderance of male researchers. This theory over generalizes from the experience of men that people ignore gender as a fundamental social division and focus on men's problems and use them as a point of reference and assume traditional gender roles.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher reviews what the contributions of previous research in the field of Folklore Studies, especially in the study of the folktale. The chapter also reviews how girls are represented in folktales considering their cultural background. This collection of materials includes scholarly articles, educational reports and some of the academic journals which deal with folktales and other related matters. In this chapter, the various scholars will be classified according to how they analyze and approach the study of folktale.

#### 2.2 Approaches to folktales

Many of the Western folklorists use Propp's morphology to analyze the folktales. The study shows that although they researched on the structure of the folktale, they depend on Propp as their point of departure. There are some of the aspects which are similar to the Southern African folktale authors such as repetition and the reasons and time of telling these stories and also the intention of tales.

Scheub in his analysis of *Xhosa ntsomi* performances, starts by telling his readers that *ntsomi* is such a unique phenomenon which cannot be repeated and will never be captured exactly the same way the narrator has told it even by the same narrator may not create the same image. He says the creation of *ntsomi* is a solo performance where the focus is on the performer. The performer is her own director, actress, singer and dancer guided by the tradition and her own experiences. He goes on to say that the *ntsomi* performer is a woman in most parts of South Africa and the finest of whom are old women. The core clichés are not changed during performances, whether for children or for adults, since they are structural keynotes of the performances. The creator of *ntsomi* does not memorize the narrative nor does she under formal apprenticeship to learn the plots and techniques. It is a person who has in her life seen hundreds of *ntsomi*

productions and her memory can still remember characters, sayings, songs and images. Such a performer is able to add details to her narratives which provide new insights and directions and she begins to investigate other elements which in the long run become inseparable.

Dundes, in his study, concentrated on the structural typology and he used the North American folktales whereby he combined the Propp/Pike structural models. He came up with the idea that Indian folktales do not have morphological units. The folktales are only composed of random unstable conglomerates of motifs. They consist of a move from a state to be feared and avoided if possible, a state of lack. The analysis of this American material demonstrates that complex stories are new and there is little cohesion between the component elements and that the old parts of the tales are the incidents and a few simple plots. Having studied Propp's morphology, Dundes explains the description of the folktales according to its component parts and relationship of these components to each other and to the whole.

He mentions that all Propp's 31 functions may not be employed at once in a folktale. As for typology, according to Propp all Russian tales, on morphological grounds, belong to one and the same structural type. At some stage he mentions that the folktales consist of just two motifemes which are Lack and Lack-liquidated. In this type of structure, Dundes discovered that the tales may vary, but the sequence of motifemes remains the same. A common pattern of American Indian folktale consists of Lack, Deceit, Deception and Lack-liquidated. The reality of folktales, for example, demonstrates that the same tale can be told with either animal or human characters.

### **2.3. Folklore approaches in South Africa**

These folklorists as well did not dwell on the subject of girl character with the aim of explaining their roles but as indicated earlier they looked at other aspects which make up the folktales. They do not concern themselves with the general approach of folktales as we have seen with the Western folklore authors but

instead they dwell on different aspects of folktale such as characterization, structure and marriage in the different tales of the African language groups.

Moephuli (1992) claims that many approaches which are used to analyze the folktales are similar and are diachronic and comparative rather than synchronic. Some approaches are more concerned and interested in how the whole world of folktale in particular came into being in its historical and geographical development from one culture to the next. Approaches also question the social functions in different cultures rather than what folktale is. He adopts the Proppian (1968) ideas as used by Dundes (1962) in his analysis of the folktales. Following Propp's morphology, folktales are described according to their functions and the relationship of these components parts to each other as a whole.

Propp's morphological unit is termed function which is the unit of plot narrative structure. Propp identified 32 functions and even though they may not all function in one tale the South Sotho uses all Propp's terminology as it is and employs all the functions as identified by this folklorist. Moephuli (1979:37) says that the printed word is dry, lifeless and also does not give folktales the various basic characteristic it deserves as a verbal art, but it is believed that some narrators may have added or reduced the original composition of folktales. His informants who live in and around Lesotho were recorded through the use of a cassette tape recorder and from there he selected the suitable tales. Unlike the tales which were collected and recorded by Makgamatha, Moephuli (1979:46) says that the tales were transcribed and re-written and translated to English. In his study he realized that the structures of folktales from other cultural groups are occasionally similar in purpose and nature to that of Sesotho folks. Similarly, Guma (1967) further studied the form, content and technique of traditional literature in Sesotho formula which has variations.

The opening words, *ba re e ne e re...* (they say it happened that...) are spoken in a slightly lower voice then followed by the story itself, with the names of the chief characters appearing quite early, usually immediately after the introductory

phrase. The ending is also a fixed formula just as Guma (1967:33) confirms in his study. In their studies, Moephuli (1979) and Mofokeng (1951:2) both classified the folktales according to subject matter and partly according to their form. They both used a number of different types and sub-types to which their dominant motifs belong, for example, animal tales, mythological tales, superhuman tales, and supernatural beings. They both made a comparison of the three Sotho languages which are: Sepedi, Setswana and Sesotho in as far as folktales are concerned. They point out the differences found in similar tales in each language as well as variants found in different versions of the same tale in one language.

Makgamatha (1987) also classified the folktales and studied their common elements such as traditional character, family relationships and the genealogical tree which was the most serious problem encountered during classification of folktales because according to this study, he discovered that there is no fixed structural analysis of folktales. For example, Scheub (1975) emphasizes the dynamic creativity of the storyteller as she arranges the actions in the tale, while Maranda (1971) also says structure is an organization of the constituent elements of a whole through an internal relationship. In dealing with structure and analysis, Makgamatha says that the stylistics focused on the personal idiosyncrasy of oppression which is the peculiar and individualistic manner in which the storyteller organizes his thoughts to make her storytelling identifiable.

Pottow (1992) explores the morphological structure of ten Zulu folktales dealing with the family and she follows this by analysis of the cultural-contextual, linguistic and literary features of these family tales, including an investigation into how these features condition the tales in their texts and performances and reveal their deeper meaning and social function. The researcher also paid more attention to the family relationship in the folktales as the family forms the basis of social interaction, education and stability in traditional Zulu culture.

She discusses the Zulu customs, beliefs and traditions which are associated with family social order as reflected in these family tales. Pottow remarks that the family folktales are used as vehicles to show off the qualification man attain if he clings to such great virtues as love, faith, hope, loyalty and the spirit of service. They are equally used to highlight human weaknesses such as greed, jealousy, hatred and arrogance and how these can lead to one's downfall.

She concurs with Olrik (1961) about the structure of the law of three when she says that the Law of Three in the folktales where the piglets insult the three animals, in the folktale '*Unkombose nosihlangusabayeni*' Ngobese sings her refrain three times. She says repetition of a song, often threefold, also contributes to the development of tension as well as eliciting a magical effect. In the Law of Two, it is evident where two are constantly the main characters and only two appear and speak at the same time. Pottow (1992:150) says that she observes the following from the authors in the way they express themselves about folktales. Firstly, she discovered that Callaway witnessed the performances of these stories and wrote them down from such memories whilst others were slowly re-performed in his study for him to record some words in writing. Secondly, she learnt that Stuart witnessed the performance of the tales that he recorded in shorthand and then wrote them out fully word by word in the evenings.

Pottow (1992:175) says the language poetically, influences the content of the story. Both texture and text are developing by the artist's imagination and creative tales. In blending of all linguistic devices, the narrator presents talent that is a complete aesthetic work of art. The use of idiomatic expression and proverbs which serve the purpose of teaching is part of the structure of the folktales.

Fortune (1974) studies Shona folktales as evidence of cultural evolution and cultural diffusion. This study of folktales discovers that the fascinating characters of the folktales make them more common in all cultures, their form, structure and plot form a coherent tradition all over the Sub-Saharan Africa. These folk natives

have overshadowed the other forms of traditional literature. He maintains that Shona folktales have received less attention than the folktales of other languages. He feels that other institutions are replacing the culture of storytelling, where school teachers are taking over the grandmother's role in education; the media also replaced some aspects of *ngano*. He adopts approaches which have been employed by other folklorists such as Moephuli (1992), PROPP (1968) and Dundes (1962).

Using Propp (1968) and Dundes (1962) he concludes that all the stages of folktales from the stage to the last are a more acceptable way of analyzing folktales. Unlike Moephuli, Fortune (1974) does not explain the stages verbatim but rather, he agrees that the sequence employed is not exactly the same. He stresses that the literary art of *ngano* is usually a narrative with community participation in its performance. The participation is expressed either by word or by song.

#### **2.4 The position of women and girls in folktales**

Women and girls have had a special place in folktales. They may not be found doing irrelevant duties around and everywhere, just as their position is clearly stipulated to be around the house. If they have to away from home, it should be for work related issues and they should be in a group. Girls are expected to take orders from elderly women in the community, this will enhance their moral status and behaviour and that will make them good wives and women of good reputation. They are always fully aware of their inferior positions in the community and therefore, they never want to argue their ability with anyone. Women are somehow born with this image of being controlled they grow up nurturing this aspect and at some stage one may say that they enjoy their status as “minors”.

De Bruin (2002) studies the role that children play in Zulu folktales. She looks at the children as an audience in folktales. The research also shows that children in folktales do not appear independently but act together with parents and other members of the family. Zulu folktales are studied in isolation thus no attempt is

made to compare them with other cultures. She describes parenthood in the Zulu folktales and discovers that it is the parent who is the pillar in the life of every child because no child is brought up in isolation; therefore folktales are seen as part of parental guidance. Apart from parents, there are other members of the family who are examined, namely, uncles, cousins, and grannies because they influence the children's upbringing. In this way, folktales are not merely a reflection, but a mirror of society. They model behaviour inductively.

When he studied girls, he only studied them and examined them as brides and siblings, and looks into the problem of bareness in women and girls which is expressed as a lack in Zulu culture. In this study, the girls are much spoken about in terms of marriages as much cherished event in the lives of the Zulu people. Zulu girls have to look up to these women as examples and models for their upbringing; appreciate their way of conducting themselves until they are married and how they behave as married women, having children of their own and taking care of their families.

According to De Bruin (2002:81) girls are referred to as "cattle of their fathers". They contribute to the father's wealth by bringing in *lobola*. In fact, the first born girl in the family is often named *Zibuyile*, meaning the cattle have returned. Girls are not permanent members of their parents household and if a girl is not married it becomes a shame on the part of her parents and that's when the immediate family comes in to discuss and find a suitable partner and usually that will be a cousin. The issue of girls not belonging seems to be a common fact in the African communities.

Mathye (2003:6) explains that in Tsonga custom, a woman's word is of no value and she is excluded from all decision-making in the community because she is not regarded as a permanent member, either in her father's house or in-laws. When she is still with her parents, it is believed she will get married and leave her own house, therefore she does not fully belong in her father's house and when she arrives at her in-laws, she always has an identity. She is addressed as 'N'wa-

Jack' but she will never be addressed in her husband's surname whereas her own children will use their father's surname.

Masenya (2003:138) is in agreement with Mathye that a female child appears to be a foreigner in her father's house; she is not counted as a permanent member of the family, for she will get married. This is why members of this culture could not see fit to educate their daughters because it was expected that they would soon leave the family to serve in other families. Even worse at her new abode, the woman, is viewed as a foreigner. If there are serious family matters to be discussed for example the *lobola* that has to be given in marriage of a daughter, her own child for that matter, she may not be involved for she is deemed a foreigner. It is customary in male dominated societies that women have no judicial powers; and such are excluded from succession. A recent case is the Nwamitwa story whereby the eldest daughter known as Philia Shilubane has appealed to the constitutional court to have her installed as the chief of that community. The case comes not as a surprise to those who understand the cultural practices of Tsonga people. There is a strong voice of dissent from the community that she is going against the vein of tradition.

De Bruin (2002:81) goes on to claim that from their earliest childhood girls in Zulu society are tutored to be the submissive and must obey the rules of society and accept their ultimate quest should be to become good wives to produce and raise children. \_This is expected to continue without any protest. She also maintains that even if she only concerned on Zulu culture, studies show that somehow this culture does not show much difference from other cultures as regards the way girls are portrayed in folktales especially when it comes to the issue of marriage. According to her study, Zulu folktales do not only convey women to be reduced to wives and mothers but it describes the kind of behaviour that would be acceptable in all societies.

She refers to the relationship of siblings such as sister whereby the role of an elder sister is more important to the society because she has to instill in her

younger sibling good manners and be responsible for her actions. She describes sister rivalry as rife and maintains that sisters who truly love each other are unfortunately in the minority in the Zulu culture. According to her study, Zulu folktales do not only convey women to be reduced to and mothers but it describes the kind of behaviour that would be acceptable in all societies. The relationship between brothers and sisters in Zulu folktales is characterized by relaxation in the presence of each other until one of them gets married. They respect one another and in many folktales the relationships between brothers and sisters may be greed, incest and murder. Another point is that boys are made aware of their “higher” status than girls. Although they are regarded as “men” from the time they are born, they are also pampered by their mothers and taught norms different from those of girls. They are taught not to be found in the company of adult men when girls are expected to be in the company of their mothers most of the time.

Pottow explains the role and of among Nguni tribe that the bride’s role during the early stages of her marriage is that of giving parents and performing services for the women of her husband’s group and after some time that she will be accepted as one of their family. Her position in the family should be that one of making them her first priority in terms of providing food, taking care of the aged and above all them she must take of her husband and children. In this case, one realises that a young bride comes into her in-law’s house being fully aware of her duties because the elders from her family have taught her the responsibilities. The carrying of her own child on her back while doing her daily chores is not an option but a practice which in itself makes her in-laws proud.

## **2.5 Functions of repetition in folktales**

Almost all folktales portray repetition as a way of stressing a point and it is a dynamic way used by the narrator to identify her in this field. Authors have each come up with ways of explaining why every folktale has songs until they somehow saw repetition as the basic or springboard from which understanding of folktales should be based. They all agree that a folktale may sound monotonous if

it is told without the melody, clapping of hand and even stamping of feet. It is therefore, a great concern when anyone who has to retell the story or rewrite the story is found to have reduced some of the songs which are repeated again and again.

Rananga (1997) laments the fact that transcription leads to a loss of the original tale in terms of structure and what its real intentions were. According to him, many cases are noticed where repetition has been compromised in various ways to an extent that the reader may no longer get all the elements in the tale in full. As a result, the story is narrated in a drab manner which leaves the audience unmoved. He is therefore concerned about the printing of the folktales leaving out repetition as these changes the 'authenticity' of the tales. As Rananga (1997) puts it, the transcribers are not the original owners of the folktale therefore their role is to collect and write down exactly as the story was narrated and should take into account the slightest elements of the tale and not attempt to change or add any meaning to archaic words that are found in songs. He further maintains that the transcribers should not make it their responsibility to try and explain the meaning of some words that may seem difficult or unfamiliar to the readers or listeners, since the tale is not their piece of work. He goes on to suggest that the printers as well should include repetitions exactly as narrated by the story teller especially in songs. The printers omit such repetition and by condensing the relevant passages, some valuable elements present in these folktales are compromised.

Indeed, some elements of folktales such as repetition, serve as the nucleus and therefore, when they are left out or condensed, they are only a shadow of reality. To show the importance of repetition in folktales, several scholars such as Makgamatha (1987) Scheub (1970) Mofokeng (1951) and Pottow (1992) have emphasized that repetition is a key to understanding folktales.

Makgamatha (1987:183) says repetition is thus used by classical story tellers for a variety of purposes, among others for the intensification of suspense, for the

simple movement of narrative to its resolution, and for the theme. Here the repetitions of songs, of core-images and even of complete narratives are included. Scheub (1970:125) sees repetition as the key structural device in the art form: action is enveloped and shaped by single expansible images, or by a series of such images. This structural repetition harmonises with the thematic repetition often given in parallel images.

Mofokeng (1951:179) believes that in the body of the story, repetition may occur especially when a task in the folktale has to be done by several people who fail then the hero comes and succeeds. These repetitions are not excessive: according to the Law of three, they are usually three in number, the third of which is followed by a climax. Pottow also in agreement with Mofokeng about the Law of three—(1992:174) says that repetition of songs is often threefold, and contributes to the development of tension, as well as eliciting a magical effect. Many of the folklorists feel that one universal characteristic of folktales is repetition because it is a good time for the narrator to stress a point and make the audience to understand. It is also a break for the narrator to decide on how to drive home goals. The children also enjoy this part of folktale since it comes in the form of a song, most of the time they are allowed to join and sing along. Rananga (1997) is of the opinion that transcribers should therefore not feel uncomfortable with this part of the folktale and thus change or leave it out. Therefore, we need to understand Rananga's concern of dissatisfaction when such elements are left out because somehow the audience may not enjoy and grasp exactly what they have to learn in a folktale. It does not matter to him how the song may be sung but he despises any transcriber who merely mentions that the song was sung without trying the lyrics.

The other problem that Rananga tries to address is the issue of transcribers leaving out the names of characters in folktales. They have the tendency of mentioning fewer characters while they merely explain some actions of other characters and yet disregarding their names. He feels that the recorders should give precise information as the readers or the audience may like to know them by

their names more as especially that some children are attracted to particular characters and take them as their role models. \_He argues that some actions of some characters should also be clearly mentioned so that the audiences are equally informed how a particular character manages to get out of a given situation. \_Whenever the narrator expresses the use of magical powers, the transcribers turn to leave out such statements whereas it is the main aim of the storyteller's point to stress the importance of magical powers.\_

What Rananga misses though is that most folktales are endeavours of a single character, sometimes nameless or in consort with other nameless characters whose actions are more important than names. These actions are what Propp defined as functions in his study of Russian folktales. Rananga (1997:15) agrees with Makgamatha that folktales recorded have lost their originality as their authors have modified and even graded them to suit the level of the readers and listeners for whom they were intended.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, one realised that the studied authors have themselves studied folktales differently each one of them with the burning issues to discuss to the readers. Well it is good also to realize that some of their aims were similar. If we look at the ways that some international authors have approached their study of folktales, we notice the similar way in which they all employed Propp's unique way of analyzing folktales. \_Authors such as Scheub (1970) and Dundes (1962) although they studied their work separately, they both cited the works of Propp as being the best in analyzing the structure of folktales. Scheub was studying the Xhosa *ntsomi* but he used the motifemes and illustrated perfectly well how they affect these tales.

Some of the Southern African scholars as well studied the structure of folktales and they used Propp's morphology. Makgamatha (1987) for example in his study mentioned that Propp's 31 functions are best models of structural analysis. Their common way of analyzing folktales was to apply Propp's method.

Apart from the form and structure of folktales, the folklorists looked into characterization and other aspects such as aims and functions of folktales and the importance of folktales in life. At least a good number of them agree that folktales are used to educate and to transfer the norms and values of a society to new generations. In characterizations, women and girls are the main focus in terms of their positions, responsibilities and roles.

Having seen and studied the works of the above scholars, the researcher has identified that none of the scholars has thus far studied the role of girl characters in folktales. This is fully studied and explained in the next chapters. Girls are divided into two or three groups whereby every group is analyzed to find out how and why they behave in a particular manner. These girls are further studied as to the way they are monitored in marriage. When the woman is old enough to make her own decisions such as the following deciding on whom to marry and how many herds of cattle should be paid for daughter's bride price. Why should women be regarded as minors and be refused a chance to discuss matters concerning their children when they are also biological parents to those children?

These are some of the aspects discussed in the next chapter with special reference to the Sepedi folktales.

## CHAPTER 3

### SOCIO- CULTURAL BACKGROUND

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, first a brief overview is given of the concept folktale as a way to set the scene for the discussion of the cultural context that is used to construct the girl character. Sufficient background of Sepedi practices is discussed to contextualize the upbringing and expectations of society of how a girl child should be socialized to conform to the needs and expectations of society. The ideal pursuit of every woman is marriage, as such, the chapter gives a cursory discussion on marriage and how it contributes to the construction of behaviour and conduct of a girl who in effect aspires to be married.

#### 3.2. The folktale tradition

A folktale is a traditional story, which is handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth either told to amuse or entertain, and it has no virtue of originality. It also provides a look into a culture's customs and morals and also helps to transfer historical and cultural knowledge to young generations. Peek and Yankah (2004:109) also agree that a folktale is one of the earliest forms of lullabies, which were used by adults in the early years of a child. The stories are told during the early hours of the evening because there is belief that whoever tells such stories, song, jokes and riddles during the day will grow horns. The taboos are part and parcel of people's folk tradition therefore every taboo is taken very seriously, especially by women because they are the main custodians of the society's culture.

Folktales are usually told by elderly women because they are the custodians of their culture. They are trusted by young parents to teach their children all important aspects of life, but the folktales are somehow directed to girls, in order to prepare them for their roles as wives and mothers, as responsible women who will respect the world of men. The older women are believed to have all the

experiences and they have been through all stages of life and culturally they are the ones who should as well welcome other newlyweds and give them some morals. Older women are also at a better position to tell these stories because their daily chores are minimal; and oftentimes have plenty of time at their disposal as they have little of the daily chores assigned to them.

According to Van Stratton (1996) a vibrant oral folktale culture as employed by older women, does not only validate folk beliefs and attitude, but also can be used to exercise social control and apply social pressure on those individuals who do not conform to the accepted behavioral patterns of the society. The tales also provide a means through which boys and girls are socialized to understand the limits of their relationships, while providing a wish fulfillment medium for them.

Kabaji (2005:167) has the idea that woman, as the prime performers; utilize the folktale performance as a stage from which they contest their subordination. Performance is done in the kitchen next to the hearth and women tell their children about desirable behaviour as a way of moulding them for womanhood. Hence the many taboos to channel their (women) thinking towards acceptable rules of the society.

The story-telling sessions are part of the preparation for marriage in girls. Within these tales, one finds instructions on how to conduct oneself within marriages. Girls are thus warned and encouraged to keep their virginity until they get married. This demand is not put on male children, while great honour is much bestowed on the girl and her family if the girl is found to be a virgin at marriage, her parents will receive gifts of goodwill from their son-in-law because they managed to preserve life. Although sex before marriage is not taken as a taboo, it is associated with filth, and is terribly discouraged. Folktales are an important medium of socializing the children because they also incorporate other folklore forms which are part of their culture such as a singing and dancing.

Canonici (1996: 66-67) believes that folktales are a storehouse of knowledge and wisdom, as their body contains the collective memories of the nation. Therefore,

although its generally accepted function is entertainment, the folktale is also performed to imbue the audience with its value system and the body of knowledge possessed and treasured by society. The stories are a true reflection and representation of the way the people explain themselves, the way they conduct their daily activities within their different communities.

A folktale as is generally known as 'nonwane' in Sepedi and has been used as a vehicle to transport and deliver some important lessons to children who believe in all folktale stories and they grow up being conscious about those things that are not good according to the stories. Elderly people, with the wisdom and experiences of life have managed to instill a sense of respect and responsibility in the children through the use of folktales. The children were taught important aspects of life. Informal as it was, it produced men and women who respected their culture, who upheld the morals of the society.

According to Makgamatha (1990:1) folktales are sometimes used to educate or frighten the children and teach them to obey the instructions from elderly people. In almost all African languages, folktales teach similar lessons, using similar characters or archetypes; to drive home their goals of socializing children in particular way, which is desirable to the society. Even if they have different names in their characterization, these characters play exactly the same roles. Both Mofokeng (1951) and Makgamatha (1989) use the folktale entitled 'Nonyana Senyamaswi' which means a bird which secretes milk in their different languages, with similar characters and plot to teach obedience to the children. This shows that the African folktale tradition is the same everywhere; the only difference is the language and other minor issues depending on the artistic conventions regulating the art form, as well as the ingenuity of the narrator. These commonalities strengthen the view that African people have a common originality hence their oral cultures are similar too.

### 3.3 Marriage in Sepedi culture

Marriage is commonly accepted as a covenant between two parties of opposite sex and traditionally this bonding should be blessed by parents from both families. Although it (marriage) may concern the two people it will finally affect the communities in which they live. Many authors have different ideas of what marriage entails and just a few have been quoted in their understanding of marriage. This does not only concern Sepedi authors only but many cultures have been studied to see if there is a different view of marriage. Offodile (2001:22) explains that marriage is the most sacred and important institution in the African culture. The entire social fibre is built upon it, and it forms a bond between two families and two communities, not just for the bride and the groom. Marriage without the blessing of the parents is a bad omen is doomed to failure and in most cases such marriages are not blessed with children.

While Offodile believes in parents for the success of marriage, other folklorist such as Mokgoatšana (1996:43) believes that marriage and culture are inseparable as two sides of the same coin. For Mokgoatšana (1996), marriage cannot be interpreted the culture from which it is being constructed. He contends that although there is a universal understanding of marriage, marriage itself involves a love relationship of two or more people and that relationship is welded and legalized by certain cultural rituals or ceremonial acts that are also highly held by the cultural groups concerned and the violation thereof arouse feeling of contempt and skeptics. Furthermore, Mokgoatšana strongly argues that a misconception that marriage is an agreement between two people is fallacious as any form of marriage amongst the Bapedi may not proceed or contracted without consent from parents, families and other relatives. It commonly held amongst the Bapedi that if a person does not consider the centrality of families in the institution of marriage such a person faces a risk of being cursed by 'badimo` (ancestors) most particularly that they shall have not been properly informed of the right of departure or a new addition in the house.

Nqcobo in Mokgoatšana also (1996:40) holds that as elsewhere, marriage amongst Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and beget children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transference of woman's fertility to the husband's family group. Therefore, culturally there is a high premium placed on children and the continuity of each lineage. To facilitate this transfer of fertility, a dowry must be paid; not to buy as the missionaries have wrongly interpreted this cultural practice, but to restore and cement the culture and sound relationship between families.

### **3.3.1 Marriage procedures, procreation and work**

At the beginning, marriage proceedings are regarded as very secretive and should therefore remain in the hands of a very capable and orderly people who are chosen from within from family members. The first step to do is to present the whole issue of marriage to the ancestors before it start. Ancestral involvement comes from the beliefs that they are not dead but they are with God and they can always speak on peoples' behalf. As the ancestors go about negotiating the bride price, culturally such a price should be some cattle because that was the foundation of caring for one another. Although some critics say that 'magadi' is equal to buying a woman as a commodity, it remains a process which is proper and legally binding and does not use any evidence of payment such as a till-slip. The cultural tradition and practices of Bapedi prioritise the payment of 'magadi' or 'lobola' by use of cattle as a way of economically sustaining both the newlywed and their envisaged. The cattle are also used for ploughing the fields as such they are basically just a source of income as it is done with money price today. Paying of the full price opens up other processes which may not proceed until the elders are satisfied, such processes include among others handing over of the bride to her in-laws and binding of 'tšhimama'. Against this background, one can even be bold enough to argue that any interpretation of this cultural practice outside its socio-economic conception is inadequate

Within the Bapedi culture, as Mokgoatšana (1996:44) further puts it:

.... marriage is legalised and contracted by the transference of bridal property called *magadi* (bride price) from the kraal of the groom to that of the bride. The transference of *magadi* therefore makes marriage a public affair and an extension of communal relations that binds the two groups together. The newlyweds shall then tie the *tšhimama* (a process of binding the two lovers) as a symbol of a knot of the two affinal relations, and the relationship is meant to weld the two families forever within this cultural group and marriage cannot be concluded without the concern of the families and relatives involved.

Flowing from this explanation, marriage should be seen as an act of bridging any potential conflict, a form of negotiating lasting peace between families, hence the exchange of gifts as a sign of working together and surrendering one's own selfish personality for public good. The goods represent a gesture of goodwill from both parties and thus signify the beginning of cordial relations.

The customary way of conducting marriage proceedings is to have *motseta* or *mmaditsela* (someone who interacts) to mediate and facilitate the transference of bridal wealth. *Mmaditsela* is usually an uncle from both sides so that even if such a person is seen to be frequenting the family house, no one will question anything since such a person is a family member, therefore he is able to keep the secret within the family during the early stages of the affair. Normally this *motseta* or *mmaditsela* should do such errands very early in the morning when people are still locked in their houses so that is not seen by many people, especially women.

The issue of witchcraft may also be avoided if the right person is chosen to be *motseta*. A good *mmaditsela* or '*motseta*' is the one who starts the process until it comes to the end. If such a person does not finish what he/she started the a problem will arise and some doubts as well if ever such a person will not sabotage the whole process through witchcraft. At the end of everything when the wedding has been finalized and a cow has been slaughtered, the newlyweds have been bound together through *tšhimama* then *motseta* is given the hind leg of the cow as a gesture of appreciation for his tireless efforts. Marriage still cannot be thought away from the idea of procreation, which happens to be

everyman and woman's dream married or unmarried. The worst punishment in marriage is when the couple cannot procreate. If such a thing happens among Bapedi, there is system of *go bofela* or *go remela* (to bind for a woman so that she can beget children) that is when a traditional doctor is sought to prepare some herbs only for the wife, this is only done if the fault lies the woman. If all these fail, the bride's family will provide another woman known as 'tlhatswadirope' to assist her sister in her conjugal responsibility especially in bearing children from such activities. *Tlhatswadirope* is a woman or a girl who is chosen to help in the place of a married woman who is unable to bear children. Such a person is chosen with the hope that she will be able to close the gap by conceiving and keeping the marriage alive. All the children borne out of such a relationship will belong to both mothers and their father. In this case if the herbs do not help another young woman will be provided specifically to bear some children. All the young women who are given to the husband are his wives and they are expected to respect the first wife even if she cannot beget children for her husband. She is the senior wife and will always enjoy her status as the chief wife in her husband's compound. If the man is the cause, a plan will always be sought by elders in the family line to ask the bride to seek assistance from his blood brothers or other relatives outside his blood line relatives and of course as explained above this is done in the strictest confidence.

Kabaji (2005:59-60) concurs with Offodile (2001) that marriage is the central theme of line in women. Kabaji interviewed the majority of Maragoli women who all reported that their main objective in life was marriage and their glory was in their children. They even acknowledge that childlessness is the most serious misfortune that could befall a woman and as a result, the birth of a firstborn child is taken very positively to signal a successful marriage. Besides the issue of women procreating, there is still this issue of women being expected to work hard to maintain their families. Even if Kabaji regards marriage as a complex affair, a meeting point of both the dead and not yet born, he still feels that everybody should get married and bear children. In the event of man proving to be impotent, the society arranges to have another man procure children for him, this is done

secretly.

Mokgoatšana (1996:55) acknowledges that women in marriage have to work hard because they depend largely on their fields for their livelihood, since they are dissociated from commodities like cattle in the family. It does not matter if the wealth in the household is a joint venture, women do not own wealth and they cannot in any way be given any controlling part upon it. Even the children they have given birth to, does not belong to them but to their husband's clan. Therefore the children will use their father's surname while the mother's are referred to in their parents surname such as *Ngwan'a Seboni, ngwana' Chuene*, just to remind them where they basically belong in case they forgot. Interestingly, they may be called *MmmaLebelo, MmaTsebe* etcetera, as if their status of motherhood is fully acknowledged to include even their husband's. This is mere mockery of their plight. The dowry from the girl's marriage is controlled by the husband regardless of how hard the woman has worked. If it happens that a man marries a woman who already has children, they will assume their new father's surname and whatever wealth they generate either through marriage or hard labor, belongs to the head of the family. It is believed that as the woman is married the children belong to the man in question. The woman therefore does not own anything in terms of what the children generate.

In another context, Mokgoatšana explains how a woman's role is defined and endorsed by some proverbs such as: *Mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo* (A woman is like a baboon her hands are eaten) a baboon is known for its remarkable industriousness and it is compared to the woman's ability to work unconditionally just to make her husband rich and at all times, striving to satisfy him and in the interim putting her own interest as the last option. In other areas witches employ baboons in their craft as they are typically naïve and show lack of insight, which when compared to women show that women as well are seen as naïve and thus portrayed negatively.

On interpreting the above proverb, Mokgoatšana (1996:52) sympathises with

women in marriage because he realised that their status is always relegated to that of subordination and of effervescence. In analysing a poem *Kgadi 'a Bakone* Mokgoatšana (1996:19) paints a clear picture of a woman in marriage as follows: ... to be a good wife requires that she should keep her mouth shut when her husband speaks, regardless of what he says, there should be no objection.”

In Sepedi culture a woman is a good bride when her lips are sewn together and does not articulate her desires or say any meaningful word. Married women are not allowed even to say anything in politics of their own social groupings, not even in the matters that affect them directly. Mokgoatšana (1996:57) further says that women are expected to endure even the hardest that a normal human being would not tolerate. Mokgoatšana regards marriage as incorporation and alienation, the woman is incorporated into a new family group where she has limited rights, but alienated from her own family group, having changed even her surname to that of her in-laws makes the distance even wider. Masenya (2003:133) supports Mokgoatšana's ideas as to why women in marriage should be submissive by telling us that, these women are taught to remain silent during initiation period. She believes that girls are indoctrinated and taught to believe that they were created to satisfy, please and serve the needs of their husbands, therefore all insubordination or 'cheek' should be whipped out of them. As a result, a woman is like a child who can easily be punished if her actions are found to be wanting in terms of patriarchal status quo.

According to Mampa (1992:77) marriage and procreation may not be separated. He is of the idea that marriage is an intimate personal union to which a man and a woman consent, consummated and perfected in a life-long partnership of mutual love and commitment. He sees it as a social institution regulated by the word of God and by the laws and customs which the society develops in order to safeguard its own continuity and welfare.

The birth of a child and others in family is indicative of a blessed and successful marriage, while a family without children is viewed with sympathy, contempt and

suspicion, despised and subjected to disparaging remarks, especially to the wife who would even be taken to healers *go bofela* (healing) practice so that she could conceive. This is also prevalent in the Vatsonga traditional community. As stated by Mathumba (1998:135) marriage is an establishment of social relationship between two families. A token of the ties between the two groups is the 'lobola' or bride price which is advanced by the husband's family and presented to the wife's parents as compensation to the loss of a member. The birth of children in this culture is not taken in the same strength because they appreciate a boy more than a girl child. They believe a boy carries and perpetuates the clan's name (Xivongo) while a girl is like a fowl which is easily given to the visitors.

### **3.3.2 Forms of Marriage**

#### **3.3.2.1 Arranged marriage**

An arranged marriage is a marriage which has been organised by parents of both husband and wife without directly involving the girl. The man is usually informed about the decision and he may as well not challenge the decision because in many instances it is to the man's advantage. In most cases arranged marriage may be the cause of polygamous marriage and *vice versa* because whenever a man is given a new wife, the parents do not look into the fact that in the long run this man may decide to look for another woman of his choice. When we talk of an arranged marriage, it does not only affect younger people, but it is also affects elderly people too. The elderly people may be affected in cases where for example, a man has been away from home for a long time and on his return it is discovered that all his peers has been married and they all have families. Such as man, referred to as *lekgolwa*, no matter how old and frail he may look at the time of his return, (as is usually the case with men than women) people will immediately be called by the elders of the family to discuss his future. The good thing about such meeting is that already the parents will be having someone in mind either from their clan or from their circle of reliable friends.

This type of marriage is bound to succeed because the woman in question as well does not have much to say as long as her parents are satisfied. The good thing about it is that the parents have been right in their match making skills. It does not matter whether the woman has children or not, in Sepedi culture we believe that when a woman is married with children we employ the proverb which says: *ngwana ke wa dikgomo* (as long as bride price has been paid all the offspring from the woman belongs to the husband's family). This arrangement anyway, has been widely accepted as a way of life in the African culture and men have embraced children from unknown fathers without many questions. Even if it was done against their wishes, they somehow manage to build homes for their children successfully. It may also happen in the case of handicapped people, be it a man or a woman whereby such a person is not able to go out and be seen, the family will arrange that such a person be married to a relative so that he/she is taken care of. Of course the main aim of this type of marriage is to allow childbearing in a healthy and acceptable environment which will cause much relief to the parents.

In Sepedi culture the choice of partner is preferably limited to the cousin who it is believed will strengthen the maternal relationships between both families by marrying a cousin. Thereafter, the search for a second or just another wife may be stretched to some respectful family friend whom the parents trust and know. Girls are not allowed to make their own choices of husbands therefore it is the prerogative of their parents to decide who they should marry. This is done without consulting with the girl concerned and when she is told there will be no arguments regardless of whether she has to marry an old man or get into a polygamous marriage. Being the fifth or tenth wife at an early age does not matter, she is assured, the best thing is that she is married. To substantiate this, Mampa (1992:73) holds the opinion that a young woman's ideas are never considered when it comes to the choice of marriage partner.

Parents regulate marriage by choosing partners for their children. The individual's freedom of choice is not considered and once they get married, both partners

have to tolerate each other in all respects. The choices of partners as already mentioned, may be done at the birth of a girl child or later in her life.

There is time when a girl will be rebellious in the decision of her parents. In the folktale below, Makgamatha (1989:43) tells us about a girl called Sewela who was forced to marry her cousin. Actually Sewela had her own rights to choose her husband because she is the one who was supposed to live with that man. It is because of her parent's pressure that she ended marrying a snake, maybe to make her mark that it is better to trust an animal than human being specially a man.

Makgamatha (1989:43) in 'Sewela le Korintsanne` tells us this:

*Go tloga bonnyaneng bja gagwe go be go tsebega gore Sewela o tlile go nyalwa ke motswalagwe. Sewela a gana nnang a re yena lesogana leo le tlilego go mo nyala. Anthe Sewela o be a forane le noga ya go dula kua thabeng ka leweng. Fela a se ke a botša motho ka lerato la gagwe. Sewela o rile go bona gore batswadi ba gagwe ba phegeletše gore a nyalwe ke motswalagwe, a iphetoša molwetši wa lepai. Mosegare ge go rile tsee! Sewela a tsoga a swara kgogo a e hlaba. A apea dijo tša moseo. Ge a feditše a itlhohlora melora a rwala megopo a ya thabeng. Ge a fihla a opela košana ya gagwe Korintsane ge a ekwa košana a tatologa a tšwela ntle. Bobedi ba tseba go letša megolo.*

From an early age it was well-known that Sewela was supposed to be married to her cousin. Sewela refused to be married by her cousin. Sewela refused vehemently and said that no man will marry her. Sewela did not tell anybody about her relationship with the snake which lived in the mountains in a cave. When Sewela realized that her parents were serious that she should be married to her cousin, she pretended to be sick and remained in her blankets when they went to the fields. During the day when everybody was either busy elsewhere or resting, Sewela would get out of the bed and slaughter a chicken, prepare it perfectly and take it to the snake called Korintsane. There she would sing until Korintsane came out of the cave then they would sit together and enjoy the carefully prepared meals.

If it happened that a young man identifies a young girl, then his parents would

start to investigate the girl's family history secretly and later there would be negotiations with the girl's family. The family wants to satisfy itself that they are not binding themselves into a relationship that would taint their lives forever; that relationship should not besmirch their good reputation in the community. The investigation looks into a good number of aspects such as: whether the girl's family does not have a bad record with their local chief, if they are not witches, the blood line curses and sicknesses which may be the result of the family's lack of regard to their culture and also they may investigate if the girl in question is a hard worker and also to find out if she has been initiated through 'koma' ritual.

This folktale shows that there were some cases where some girls did not agree with their parents and made their own choices. These types of girls might have not known their rights in terms of making their own choices but somehow they refused to be dictated to when it came to their future. However, such girls as represented by Sewela end up getting married to worse husbands than the ones their parents had arranged them for. In this folktale, Sewela got married to a snake, which symbolizes "danger" and "untrustworthiness", as it is a poisonous reptile. Even in the Sepedi language, the expression, semangmang ke noga (so and so is a snake) carries with it meanings of unreliability, undependability and untrustworthiness. The moral lessons of these folktales are that parents are right to arrange marriages for their children, lest they will become victims by getting married to the wrong people.

In the African tradition, it is expected that every woman whether attractive or not, should get married. Although the beautiful ones are an envy of every man, the ugly and unattractive ones are also given a fair share in marriage by being booked into some family's friends and relatives at an early age. The general belief is that even if they are ugly, their unwavering support for their husbands through hard work will keep them in their marriages form the central part of Sepedi culture because it is believed that the practice will eliminate witchcraft and unwanted divorce. Anyway, divorce itself is much less spoken about due to the fact that girls

are first initiated by elderly women and told that once married one is prohibited from coming back.

### 3.3.2.2 Polygamous marriages

Polygamy refers to a situation when a man marries more than one wife and this has long been part and parcel of African culture. A polygamous marriage is another way of trying to eliminate unmarried women in the community. The researcher puts much emphasis on the many women because they were the ones who were being given away to prospective husbands even when it meant they would share that man. Being in polygamous marriage is caused by many factors. A good example might be in a situation as detailed above or where a woman does not beget children after she has been married. The family will offer another woman for the man maybe from the same woman's family or just a family choice. Such a man may as well decide at some stage to marry the third and forth until he is satisfied or old enough. Sometimes polygamy is caused by parents who want to extend friendship or they decide to keep an old relationship; they may give a young girl to a man because he is rich and they want the best for their child. In the folktale entitled 'Mpho ya badimo` (Makopo 2003:18) tells the story of a girl who was given to her cousin because the cousin was handicapped. The girl got married as the third wife and she did not complain because she had a family.

*Mosadi o kile a belega ngwana a sena maoto. Mmagwe a mo khutiša a tšhaba gore ba tlo mmolaya le ngwana wa gagwe gwa thwe yena ke moloji gomme ba tla re ngwana yo ke sehlola. A ikhomolela a re: ke mpho ya badimo! Hlogo e ile ya gola mmagwe a mo nyakela mosadi, a be a mo nyakela le wa bobedi, gomme malome majadihlogo le yena a mo fa wa boraro e lego motswala. Basadi ba, ga ba tsebe monna wa bona, monna a bonwa feela ke mmagwe. O be are mosegare ge go phatlaletšwe a tšwe ka mokutwaneng a binabine ka lethabo mo lapeng. Ka le lengwe la matsatši, ngwana malomeagwe e lego mosadi wa boraro, a eya kgonyeng a lebala kgare. Ge a boela gae go lata kgare a mo humanetša a sa bina mo lapeng a nnoši. Ge mosadi yo a tšhaba hlogo ya mo šala morago go fihla molatswaneng wa meetse. Ge mosadi a tshela, hlogo ya wela ka nokeng. Batho ba moo ge ba ekwa mokgoši ba phalala gomme gare ga bona go na le ngaka ya matwetwe. Gona fao mosadi yoo o ile a thoma go lla a tšhogile*

*gomme ngaka ya mo laela gore a opele košana.*

*Ge a dutše a opela bjalo hlogo yela ya thoma go mela ditho ka moka tša mmele, gomme gwa tšwa monna yo mmotse, ba mo fa lekgeswanyana a apara bay a gae. Gwa dirwa monyanya o mogolo gomme Rahlogo a leboga mosadi wa gagwe yoo a mo opeletšego gomme a dula ka lethabo le basadi ba gagwe ba bararo.*

The woman once gave birth to a healthy big head without some feet and other parts of the body. She hid the child from other members of the community because she feared they would think that she was a witch, and kill her. The head grew faster and when some beards appeared she started to think of getting him a wife. She married the first wife for him, and then the second one and the uncle gave him the third one who was his cousin by birth. All the three wives did not know their husband; they had never seen him. When everybody had gone out to work the husband would come out of the house and start dancing out of happiness. One day his cousin forgot some material which she supposed to use in the fields and she quickly ran back home to fetch the cloth. She found their husband still dancing and was so frightened to see the big head. When she decided to run away the big head followed her until she arrived at the river. When she crossed the river, the husband fell into the river then everybody made a loud noise. The community heard their noise and came out to help and among them was a traditional healer who advised her to sing. As she sang the husband gained some other limbs of his body until he was complete man. The three wives were happy to see their husband but they all praised his third wife who was also a cousin. At home they had a very big party and the three enjoyed with their husband.

The folktale above shows that a good wife is the one who is supportive of her in-laws, regardless of situations. The three wives never complained and to make things easier for their own lives they did not even peep through the house to see their husband. Respect also plays an important role in folktales. They listened to their mother-in law, and never questioned her why this and that. They supported her in her misery even if they were not aware of that.

### **3.4. Girls as brides and their responsibilities**

It is a cultural issue that every girl wants to make a beautiful bride, get married to a rich man and have the family of her own. It is also a wish for all parents that their girl children should get married, hence all the guidance for girls than boys in

matters relating to marriage. Nqcanqca (1987:5) has noticed that from early childhood, girls are made to partake in adult life activities by being assigned to act as nurse maids of their younger brothers and sisters. They are also gradually introduced into the performance of household duties so that by the time they reach puberty stage, they are capable of coping with all household duties of their own. The initiation of the girls marks the end of their childhood years and advertises their readiness for marriage to the public especially to the males.

A married woman is told that *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* (a woman's grave is at her in-laws) this means that a woman gets married, she may not decide to go back to her parent's house because of problems in her new family, but she has to stay on and show her womanhood. Any woman who may decide to return to her family, is viewed with suspicion that she might have been send back due to her witchcraft practices and her family will be the talk of the whole village which will make them so uncomfortable that they may end up leaving and settling somewhere else, where they are not known.

A bride is prepared for marriage by receiving instruction, the responsibilities of marriage, and facts of life from elderly women. After she has been given all information about how to behave in her new home, then a mentor may be assigned to her to introduce her to her new world of other woman where she is informed that her husband is correct in all decisions, to avoid arguments in the house. According to Moephuli (1972:11) it is contrary to the custom that a woman should doubt her husband's love. It is usually for a wife to voice her doubts to her husband; the procedure is for her to report any such misgivings to her husband's people. This implies that she must have full proof of such acts before creating a *indaba*. All these rules are given to the new bride by her mentor to avoid embarrassment in the family.

Nqcanqca (1987:6) mentions that as a new bride, the girl is taught or reminded to stay away from any matter that affects her husband. Her attitude in such issues should remain placid and uncomplaining towards decisions taken by her

husband's people because she is an outsider. A dominating wife is not tolerated in African tradition because the custom refers to woman as children.

A new bride will be given a mentor to guide her. Basically, much emphasis is laid down on womanhood and its virtues because women are the mothers of the nation as child bearers and home builders. Conformity to the values as prescribed by the society will ensure the woman's acceptance in the family circle. The new bride looks forward to carrying forward the surname of her husband because that is another main aspect of being married. The wife shall not tell husband the number of children she would like to have. Actually childbearing becomes the order of her life because it will enhance the status of her husband in the community and earn the husband a good measure of respect.

According to Nqcanqca, when a married woman gets her first child, her status changes, and she is more respected in her new home. Especially if the newborn baby is a boy, then she is said to have fulfilled the main function of marriage and that gives her better social standing in the community. The more children she bears the better she is regarded in the family. Fertility as mentioned earlier on in this chapter is the main aim of marriage and every young bride should know that her happy stay in her in-law's house depends on that aspect. If a couple cannot produce children, the curse is usually placed on the woman hence she is termed *nyopa* or *moopa* (the one who cannot bear children) and there is no special term for a man. For a new bride, childbearing also serves to secure her marriage. Sometimes the brides also have some problems in their families but they are not allowed to complain. They have to tolerate and pretend that everything is fine for the sake of their families; otherwise people will think that they have not been given sufficient rules.

Women are not allowed to complain about their husbands and unhappy marriages, such complaints may be revealed during working hours in the fields through songs or alternatively, the bride will only tell it to her mother the day she visits them. The mother as well shall not tell it to her father but instead she will

encourage the bride to stay on because that's part of displaying tolerance, and again that is womanhood. Dlamini (1995:68) tells that when Swazi women are unhappy in their social institutions especially marriage, they express their dissatisfaction through oral songs. This is also applicable to Bapedi where women also express their frustrations through songs. One of these songs goes:

*Nka se nyalwe Bopedi ke tšhaba tšhilo le lwala mma wee,  
Ka šila wee, ka šila wee,  
Nka se tšewe Bopedi, nka se tšewe Bopedi,  
Ka šila wee, ka šila wee.  
Ke peputše ngwana, joo! Go bohloko.*

I shall not marry in Bopedi I am afraid to grind some corn my dear mother,  
To grind oh, and grind oh,  
I shall not marry in Bopedi, shall not in Bopedi,  
To grind oh, and grind oh,  
With a child on my back oh! It's so painful.

The song is about a woman who gets married in Bopedi area. Even though she loves her husband she is unhappy about the situation because she has to grind corn every day and to make matters worse, she worries the child on her back. It is so painful for her because even her mother is not near to help her. She then talks out her problems through a song and tells how much she regrets the whole exercise. As long as she does not contemplate going back to her parent's house, it is a good sign that she is a real woman who can stand all the weathers and storms of married life. The elderly women will hear the song and understand that what she is going through is one of the duties of married woman, she has to work hard be unhappy and still be able to smile to the outside world as if nothing is wrong. She cannot go out and start telling out all her problems to the people and what she is going through. She must keep it a secret until she goes to her mother then she can tell her all that worries her and the mother will comfort her, but still a good mother will encourage her daughter to stay.

### **3.5 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has been a brief discussion of what folktales are used for in Sepedi culture. The elderly people are regarded as the main storytellers in our culture and they are well conversant with the results of folktales in younger girls. The folktales are told in a way that they produce responsible citizens who will at all times obey their culture. Taboos are also discussed as a way maintaining order, whereby people have boundaries about what to eat and how to react to other cultural situations. Respect and obedience are part and parcel of folktale culture. A married woman is taught to learn to keep quiet, even when things are not good rather than go about in a less decent manner telling people about one's family matters.

## CHAPTER 4

### GIRLS IN SEPEDI FOLKTALES

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter is about the way girls are brought up because they are expected to be stronger in their married life. Girls are brought up in such a way that they should know that when a woman is not married, her status is such that the society does not respect her. It is therefore important for girls to behave well so that they get married.

#### 4.2 Girls in Sepedi folktales

In Sepedi folktales, girls are regarded as people who cannot make informed decisions and therefore, they should at all times be in the company of older women who will guide them. They are easily misled and it is out of this practice that even when they are married they are still regarded as their husband's children because they are still not given opportunities to speak out their minds. Their husbands are the ones who stand up for all the decisions in the family sometimes a husband can make his own decision in the house without even informing his wife why such decisions were made. Actually no woman is supposed to question any decision taken by the husband because no one will even bother to listen to her, let alone give her a satisfactory answer.

According to Elshtain (1982:606) Women historically had no place to bring their thoughts. When they did speak, their language was labelled so much reactive noise devoid of meaning and significance. Although women are labelled as liars and gossipers, Kabaji 2005:48 still maintains that men use women's ideas to settle disputes. In essence, therefore, although women are not directly involved in settling disputes, they are an integral part of the verdict for it is not given until they have been consulted. The exclusion of women from the actual hearing of cases is a deliberate attempt by society to massage men's ego. This system may seem to be oppressive to women today but it was once a good way of life, where only a

few women would rebel against their parent's decision and because it was done by few people within the majority, it was never discussed or seen as a major problem.

Culture has made the girls so quite that they can only speak their minds when they are alone. The fact that girls are silent in the folktales is not because they have much choice but they are initiated to remain silent even when things are obvious for them to talk. Men know that women are just as powerful as they are but for their own security, and to be seen as men with authority, they should not allow women to speak in public. Getting women under control has not been easy and hence the proverb: He who has managed to keep a wife in control has managed to tame an elephant.

Although much emphasis is laid on Sepedi folktales, other language groups have also been studied to give support to some facts which might look and sound common. Many African cultures are therefore mentioned with examples as supporting statements that girls of all cultures are treated and portrayed the same ways in folktales. Some few examples which are not studied in full details are Shona folktales, Tsonga, Zulu and all other Sotho language groups. Only few examples of folktales are quoted in these languages, just to give a reader some points to compare.

In this study, girls are divided into four categories, for example there are girls who come from royal families. This group is mostly respected and even when they get married it becomes the concern of the community to support them because they are born of parents who are regarded as the children of the community. *Bommago banenyana ba, ba nyetšwe ka ditseka tša setšhaba, mola botatagobona ba nyaletšwe ke setšhaba.* The mothers of such girls were married with the cattle from all families in the community, their fathers never worked to get cattle to marry their wives. Therefore, these parents as well are cared for by their communities.

When these girls from royal families get married, the whole village is forced to

partake in some activities such as cleaning which is done by younger boys and girls, collecting firewood by bigger boys, practicing new songs by all the village girls and boys and even preparing sorghum beer, which is mainly women work. The men will gather at the central place in the village *kgoro* to discuss about *magadi* or *lobola*. This process is only applicable when the king's son/daughter gets married.

The other group is that of orphans and stepdaughters, they are the children who may be left with one parent or none at all. This group forms a larger part of the folktale community and they depend mostly on their immediate families or even strangers for survival and their lifestyle is always a disaster. The last group is that of siblings and twin sisters where there's always hostility and selfishness which may end up in death plans on the other twin or sister. All the above groups will be dealt with individually with examples given from any of the African language group to show that even though much emphasis is on Sepedi folktales all cultures share the same experiences too.

The most common element in these groups is the fact that they all know how to sing although it may be done for different purposes. A song anyway forms part of every folktale. Pritchard and Whitely (1975:109) also agree that song forms the basic element in the folktale and is included in the inherited tradition because it frequently serves the central thematic function. It's most important use is at the crisis when the character seems to have no rescue but to express her in a song, but sometimes a song is just an expression of joy. We therefore shall look into the different categories of girls and observe how they are treated as they grow up and also study their marriage life and how the society responds to their plight. This chapter will also focus on the key issues such as cruelty, greed, discrimination, abuse, neglect and vulnerability as these are the common elements in the lives of these characters.

#### **4.2.1 Orphans**

An orphan is a child whose parents have died and usually has not been formally

adopted. Orphans cannot be left alone to fend for themselves. They would usually be adopted by other family members or even unrelated members of the community. Should all forms fail, the institution of traditional leadership would assume the responsibility to care for orphans. It is unthinkable in any given community for young or teenage orphans to raise other siblings

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, orphans play a bigger role in the folktale and without them realities of life may not be realised. The most common fact about them in the folktales is that they are abused either by their surviving parent or their extended family's children to such an extent that the community is left with no option but to intervene. The girls are usually expected to look after cattle and donkeys, wash some dishes and do all other household chores while other girls of their age in the neighborhoods play enjoy their games as young girls.

These girls are not allowed to associate with other girls or even attend daily occasions such as weddings and girl dances where they may meet other people. They are kept captive to make sure men do not see them. In Motopiwa (Makwala 2006:17) agrees and adds this: *Sa go hlomola pelo, le košeng o be a ganetšwa, a napa a ipha go bopa matšomela*. Even then her stepmother did not want people to know that she could make clay pots. Her stepmother who kept her in the house did not want to acknowledge her God given talent of making beautiful clay pots. When the king bought her clay pot where they were displayed, the king also called for the owner of the pot to come, her mother was angry but could not stop her anymore. Even the girls, who made clay pots with her, hated and discriminated her. When she brought her pot it was placed at the end of the row, with the intention that the king would not choose it. When the king picked on her pot, the other girls wanted to argue that it was not hers pot but she had marked it. The king called for her to come and she was married to the king. *Motopiwa ka go khukhuna a iša la gagwe a le swaile ka maragong*. She marked her clay pot when she placed it in the row.

These girls (orphans) are also very beautiful and in the folktale they are basically locked away so that they are not seen by men, who may love and decide to marry them, they are treated as servants and slaves, they do not have time to wear beautiful clothes and sometimes they do not even have any decent clothes at all. Like in this folktale, this girl called Motopiwa did not receive any new clothes. She wore the same old clothes she had when she came to stay with her uncle. *Diaparo ya ba tšona tšela a go tla natšo.*

In the folktale *Mošimane wa dišo (Makgamatha 1991)* a boy and his sister became the only survivors of a great epidemic that plagued the community. Everyone infested with sores died, and the two siblings survived to inherit the wealth and treasure left to them.

Instead of neighbouring communities devising plans to safeguard the welfare of the orphaned children, they suggest:

*“A re yene re late lekhumo lela kowa, re yo mo tšea le dikgomo tšela, re te re di dye mo”* (Let us go and fetch that wealth there and come and eat them). This shows cruelty at its best by the people and is a bad situation where no one would love to be in. The poor children who are supposed to be looked after are treated unfairly by the whole community. The community is overcome by greed and thus exploits these vulnerable children. The community fails to extend a helping hand to those in need, as such do not show compassion and love as it is expected. It is also a flagrant abuse of power to dispossess them of what they have, what rightfully belongs to them. The children are subjected to inhumane treatment despite their destitute condition.

According to the community these children were not important, but they only wanted their wealth to enrich themselves. They are discriminated against and when they arrived in that village, they were made to live outside due to their sores, while their cattle were taken in. *Bona a ba dule kowa ntle.* The main aim of the community to accept the two kids into their territory was to eat up all their cattle. When they (kids) were outside, separated from their cattle, the boy could

release their cattle by singing. Their bonding grew so strong that these siblings manage to live and survive the wave of problems they were faced with. The boy who had the supernatural powers, managed to sing out to all the cattle to come out from where they were kept, and they managed to escape the village.

Similarly, in *Mokgadi le Matobole* by Makwala (2006:31) the orphans are in the custody of their uncle and stepmother. The stepmother ill-treats them, and develops a negative attitude towards *Matobole*. "*Lehufa le ile la ba dira gore ba tsenwe ke moya, ba ile ba bona bokaone e le go bolaya Matobole, gore lehumo le fiwe morwa wa bona Matome.*" *Malome* is a very significant institution in Sepedi culture. He is effectively an extension of the mother; a male mother as it can be gleaned from the prefixal morpheme *ma-* that refers to the mother. *Malome* belongs to the maternal kin, and thus assumes a sociological role that maternal relatives are bound to serve. A fundamental role of the maternal kin is to care for the sister's siblings as if they are one's own.

Against this background, *malome* has to look after his sister's orphaned children. Contrary to this expectation, "*malome' a bona le mohumagadi wa gagwe ba bona bokaone e le go bolaya Matobole*" (Translated) Their uncle and his wife saw the best thing was to try to kill *Matobole*. The discourse of killing implied in the quotation explains the gruesome treatment orphans are subjected to in the society. It is greed, jealousy and contempt that bedevil the relations among these characters. It is interesting how *malome* and his wife wish to dispossess the orphaned children of their wealth through murder. *Malome* not only represents a biological femininity, but also a negative portrayal of the feminine. In *Motopiwa* by Makwala (2006:17) the uncle and his wife punish the girl almost daily for no good reason. The girl works hard, does not associate with other girls let alone playing outside. "*Tšhiwana ya batho ya no fogohlela diropeng, mešomo yohle ya lebana yena. Bangwe ge ba eya košeng yena a ganetšwa.*"

The above examples are an indication of how human greed can overshadow the spirit of *ubuntu*. People are so much absorbed in the love for material things and

in the process they forget the importance of human life. In both folktales the boys were in trouble of being killed for what they had while the girls were not thought about. In the folktales girls are not viewed as obstacles. In both tales if the boys were eliminated, the wealth would belong to their killers. It is believed that girls are ignorant, harmless and easy to deal with. Girls are always excluded from the wealth of the family and they do not even have access or control over the cattle.

Girls in these folktales have been very silent informers who made it possible for the boys to evade all dangerous situations. These girls are not even given names due to the cultural believe that they are minors, dependent and passive characters with no active role to play ,except to follow their brothers for security and love. Whatever better role the girls might have played is ignored because they may not be seen to be more active and cleverer than boys. They are not allowed to talk openly as that would belittle their husbands, they would rather give guidance to their husbands behind closed doors so that husbands will be the one to speak out their (women) ideas to their fellow men as if they were their own.

The researcher is in agreement with Kabaji (2005:99) when he says that all men are utterly dependent in infancy and the central authority figure and the nurturing persons are females. This dependency is so hidden in the folktale narrative process. Every woman knows that men rely on them and that the idea that men are independent and women are dependent is essentially a false one. A girl as observed in nature grows up knowing that she is expected to marry a man whom she will nurture, love and also give emotional support. Masuku (1997:3) believes that women are either daughters or wives of males, and made little contribution to culture, because they have been denied the right to create history along with men. This assumption can be found true because women have no space in the running of affairs of the family and the community. They are relegated to domestic chores and all political and judicial power are in the hands of men as if they were the only species who to think positive facts.

#### 4.2.2 Stepdaughters

A stepdaughter is a girl who has lost one parent and has to be looked after by the remaining parent especially the father. The father will at some stage marry the second wife with the aim that she will help him raise the girl like a mother should. Things do not always work out well for the poor girl, at first the father may not know but he will soon join his wife to abuse the girl, more especially if the new wife has her own children. A good example is the folktale by Molokomme (1992:42) Thebola wešo. The folktale is about the kids whose father marries a second wife but when she begets her own child she influenced their father and grandmother to hate them. *“O rile go ba le ngwana wa ngwanenyana a hloya bale ba mosadi wa pele, lehloyo la fetela monna wa gagwe le mokgekolo.”*

At least one would think that their grandmother would love and protect the children, but the girl is so neglected, the very same girl who looked after her stepmother's child was more vulnerable. She could not defend herself was abused by all the elderly members of the family. It is jealousy that will make the stepmother not to like the girl she will be abused so that no man will look at her. She thinks that she might be more beautiful than her own children. If the girl is lucky enough she might also get married to a rich man while her own children are not lucky enough to get married at all.

Although the aim of the folktale is also to develop the children and make them to grow up as individuals who respect culture, much attention is given to girls because they are ones who bring up the children in families, and are always closer to children than men normally does. Girls are taught to work hard so that during the hardest moments such as these, as given above, they are able to cope. Girls grow up with this desire to work such that they even compete because somehow that's what they are encouraged to do daily, to make them available and useful; since they have been told that an industrious woman is the pride to her family. Sometimes when stepmothers become harsh to these girls, they are not aware that they are indirectly preparing them for future.

### 4.2.3 Twin-sisters and siblings

In the examples that will follow, the sisters are portrayed as rivals, while a boy and a girl have a better relationship with one another. Their bonding is so strong that they protect and care about one another. Girls, whether twins or not, they will always display sign of jealousy and negative and unhealthy competition, whereby they will always imitate one another, which results in the other one failing the test because of the difference in their level of obedience. The elder one is stubborn and uncompromising, while her younger sister is generally meek. This type of folktale girls is taught that obedience is another element which makes a good woman. Masenya (2003:135) sees obedience as something which makes up a good woman; she believes a worthy woman will do all her domestic duties effectively and without complaint. As part of her responsibility, she is expected to have compassion towards others including her husband; she has to please and serve him.

Girls are taught to obey the rules from everybody including strangers because one never knows who will decide to pay *lobola* at the end of the day. As for the issue of carrying and obeying some instruction many folktales give the impression that girls are more at risk of being in danger if they refuse to do as requested than boys. Masola (1988:17) in the folktale *Mokgadi le Mokgatšana* relates the story of siblings which shows a lot of competition. The folktale serves to encourage obedience because the girl who obeyed all the rules ended up with the wealth that she wished for, while the other girl returned home empty handed due to her bad temper. *“Mokgekolo are go Mokgatšana, o thuše yo mongwe le yo mongwe yo o gahlanago le yena ka mokgwa woo o ntiretšego ka gona!”* This was an instruction from a complete stranger, but Mokgatšana agreed and went along helping whoever she met along the way. A snake, which is the most dangerous animal asked her for soft porridge and she cooked and after the snake ate, it gave him some clothes, pearls, and leather clothing and she went home a happy girl. *Mokopa ge o fihla wa ja wa fa Mokgatšana diaparo, dipheta le maseka yena a leboga mokopa gomme a ya gae.* At home her sister could not hide her envy;

she quickly decided she also wanted all those beautiful goodies. Her younger sister wanted to guide and advice her that it was not easy for her to get all the beautiful things, but she was in a hurry to start with the journey. *Mokgadi ge a bona dilo tše botse tše, a seke a senya nako a hlapa a itokišetša tsela.* As a matter of fact she was motivated by greed and the desire to have everything to herself. Along the way she refused every request and when a big snake wanted to swallow her, she ran back home empty handed, unable to liquidate the anticipated lack in Dundes' terms.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, it was because of jealousy that *Mokgadi* also thought of going to look for wealth exactly the same way her younger sister did. In case where siblings are both girls, folktale displays a lot of struggle between the girls to such an extent that they may even plot to kill one another. They will always have struggle about so many small things such as who is more beautiful, as to who is more hardworking, but when comes to marriage, it is expected that an elder sister should be the first to get married. Sometimes it may work the other way round with the girls of course depending on who is lucky enough to be married first, whereas with the boys the older does not change. The older one has to be married first, unless he is somehow physically challenged not to be able to catch up with the normal expectations of life, then in such matters parents will allow the younger one to marry first.

In the case where the siblings are girls and a boy, folktale do not portray much hostility in their relationships but rather the siblings have shown much compassion towards one another and may help one another whenever they are faced with problems. These siblings will employ whatever means they can to assist each other from dangers. One way of helping and information has been the use of songs. In folktales songs are sometimes used to communicate with one another without directly involving other people. The people around may not understand what the song is all about but the person to whom the song is directed will understand. In other folktale songs are directly used to inform people about important issues. The folktale below shows the importance of songs

because if the girl did not have a way of informing her brother, he could have eaten poison and died.

In the folktale *Mokgadi le Matobole*, Makwala (2006:31) tells us about the siblings, *Mokgadi* and *Matobole* who were also orphans. *Mokgadi* was a girl while *Matobole* was a boy. The two had a very good relationship; her brother was made himself a hero by defending their wealth from their uncle and his wife. Whenever the uncle and his wife spoke about a plan to eliminate *Matobole*, her sister would overhear them and decide on a strategy to inform him secretly.

*Leano e bile go mo tšhelela sehlare ka dijong ka ge ka mekgwa e mengwe ka moka ba paletšwe. Ba ile ba sa hwenahwena ka lona, kganthe Mokgadi o a ba kwa. A re go swiela a bona leano e le go yo tšholla diswielwa tšeo kgauswi le moo Matobole a bego a le gona, gore a mo kwe ge a bolela le yena ka košana yeo.*

Their plan was to poison his food since all other plans had failed. While they were still whispering, *Mokgadi* heard them. She swept and took all the dirt to a place where his brother was sitting, and she started to sing the song as a way of telling him not to eat the food.

In most cases she would quickly compose a song related to the incident she had heard, and go out to a suitable place where he would hear her when she sang to him. One of the best songs that she composed to save her brother's life goes like:

*"Matobole wešo.  
Maswi o seke wa ja,  
Maswi a tšhetšwe more moni  
Ge Matobole a ekwa kopelo yeo, a kwešiša gabotse, a re:  
Ke a go kwa ngwana mma,  
Bjo ke bošiwana bja lapeng lešo,  
Ke re kerenke ke re ketee!"*

My brother *Matobole*,  
Do not eat milk today,  
Milk has been poisoned.  
And *Matobole* replied and said:  
I hear you my sister,  
This is painful in our home,  
Thank you, thank you

The two siblings above were so much in good terms as earlier stated that

whenever the siblings were a girl and a boy they went along very well. Unlike in the story of two girls as siblings, they were not hostile towards each other.

#### **4.2.4 Girls from royal families**

This group is always surrounded by other girls because of their royal status and throughout their lives, they are not keen to work by themselves but there are other women who by custom and tradition have to work for them. Even when other girls are taught to work hard they (commoners) are given instructions even to work for these princesses. The other girls do not find this practice being wrong but instead regards it is an honour to render services for them. They are not well conversant with the activities they should do except when to their roles as wives to kings. In short their needs are catered for by the communities in which they are married. Their main roles will be to beget children who will be brought up by other women who are chosen by the elders of the community. According to Sepedi culture when these girls get married, they are addressed as *mmakgoši* (queen, the one who will give birth to the future king) which means they are the mothers to the *kgoši*, (king) by simple extension, mother of the nation.

The choice of husband is still an issue of the parents, but this time the partner should as well be the son of a king and should as well be destined to be a king himself. Since such marriages are the responsibility of the communities, not of families as it is with other girls the paying of *magadi* is discussed by the elders from both sides, who are strong subordinates of the ruling king. The issue of investigation into actions such as witchcraft is not practiced in this case because a king will always marry from his maternal parents as his first wife, while the other wives are not considered as valuable as the first one. *Mmakgoši* (queen mother) will preside in the meetings in the absence of her husband while the others will only be told of the outcomes and they are not allowed to show dissatisfaction. *Mmakgoši* popularly known as *timamello*, (the one who extinguishes fire to bring peace in the royal kraal) is the first wife of the king, who is chosen for him from another royal house. She is the one who rightfully should give birth to the next

king of the community, and all her children should be kings and queens. By birth this woman should be the queen like having been born from the queen mother she is also given to this prince as well, normally they should be related in one way or another.

The queen is married using cattle for *lobola* from all members of the community, and she is their 'Mother' which means she is the one who should at all times see to the welfare of all women and children. Although she is termed the 'Mother' of nation, she is also taken care of by all women in terms of ploughing her fields, washing, cleaning and babysitting. She is always surrounded by elderly women who give her some advice on how to handle matters concerning women in the community, and also helping her to accept other younger wives who are also married to the king. Her private life is more of a public interest because they will even wish to know when she falls pregnant before her husband and they will be the ones to break the news to her husband officially before she can tell him. They cook for her and make sure that she is even more comfortable than them.

The role of royal marriages is basically to maintain peace between families and in the king's kraal. The king looks after the whole community issues and is able to solve all problems with the help of some elders while the queen is only there to support him especially when comes to minor women issues. Their main objective is to make sure that whatever happens is cascaded accordingly to the royal members, following the proper protocol of reporting and solving of matters. The queen mother is respected until death because her daughter is the one who will be the next queen mother. The king's other wives can have their daughters married to other communities to rule as descend from royal lineage, by blood

Such marriages will not attract much attention from nearby villages like it can be with the king's first wife. Their mothers will rejoice that at least their daughter are also married in royal families even though sometimes they are not queen mother; being married as second or even fifth wives at least it is better since they are also taken good care of, they are no longer serious commoners. Their (other king's

daughters) marriage into other royal families is another way of extending friendship with such kings and also a good gesture of acknowledging the fact such a person is not the daughter of the *timamello*, will only be informed of final results of what was discussed about like other people in the kraal.

In cases where the king's wife is a commoner, she will also enjoy the status of being a king's wife just like the other wives who are married as second and third, even if they are not from royal families. Such queens are not allowed to take part in more serious roles because they only happen to be married by the king due to circumstances that might not be preventable. In the folktales, girls and even king's daughters get married to strangers due to circumstances which are beyond the king's control or as a means to save his (the king) people from draught, sicknesses and so on. For example, in the folktale by Makwala (2006:10) *Mosatiwa le Nogakgolo*, the story is about an ordinary young man who gets to inherit a place in the royal family, because of his bravery.

There was draught in the country and the people there had much respect for their ancestors. Traditionally, even when facts are obvious to see, the king and the traditional healer has to throw bones to make sure it is the bones that speaks. Africans cannot live without the help of their forefathers. The people believed their king could only get answers from ancestors. When the king went to the traditional healer it was suggested that the only person who could help the whole village would be a young boy who was the only child of his mother. *Ngwageng wo mongwe komelelo e kile ya wa go šoro, phulo le meetse tša felela dikgomo tša šitega le go hwa, meetse gwa šala a bodibakgolo bja Maweni. Kgoši a rata go kwa wa ditaola molomo.*

This young boy, if he could manage to beat the drum in the caves where a very big snake lived; the king would give him his daughter. *Sepheho sa kgoši ya ba gore: Lesogana leo le tla putswa ka Sebotsana morwedi wa kgoši, gomme yena o be a le botse go phala bohle.* Normally, the payment could have been many cattle from the villagers themselves, but the risk was too much and the sacrifice was a

girl.

In this case the king was prepared to change the normal cause of affairs and allow his daughter to be married to an ordinary man. An ordinary man would change from being a commoner to being an important king's man. This was the only way to rescue the people and animals which were dying in large numbers daily. The king as the father of his people had to come up with an attractive offer. Men refused to go into the caves while women whose sons could help the country, refuse their only sons to try their luck. A poor boy from another village tried his luck, and there was a very big rain and he was given the king's beautiful daughter, cattle and his own village to run. *Mosatiwa* also tried his luck, and a torrid rain ensued *Mosatiwa* was rewarded with a bride *Sebotsana*, cattle and other livestock.

In the cited folktale above, the girl who was supposed to marry the king by birth, and be the queen, was not afforded any opportunity to accept or even to refuse to marry this poorest man due to the situation which the country was facing. Her father, who was the king did not have chances as well, he had to think fast on how he could rescue his own people. It is in this type of cases where an ordinary man or girl and his family will gain the opportunity of being incorporated into the royal house due to the circumstances which no one can contest. We see an ordinary young man being given the chance of his lifetime. This young man was also brought to the king's kraal, given a portion of the land and people who will be his subjects. Within a short time one man's life changed from living in poverty, to being provided with workers. This did not come as surprise to the people in the community therefore; they could not argue about their wealth being given to strangers, instead the young man could be given more wives. One may argue that the king had many options to offer as his price but they all believed in the ancestral power that a person more especially her daughter who is taken as the "wealth" of his community, be given away. This takes us back to the issue of polygamy because the man who married the king's daughter is now a rich man, he qualifies to marry more women if he so decides in future.

Of course there is time when the king's son will be marry girls outside royal families. This may be caused by traditional events such as dance where one girl dances better than all the girls, and attract the king's son. In other cases men simply offered their daughters just to make friends with the king, while others offered their daughters to the king in order to secure a haven for their children or as payment for their debts. Such a move will need a strong man who is not afraid to face challenges like in the folktale by Mangokoane (1975:55) *Mahlamaahlamolla* we are told of a poor man who wanted his only daughter to be married to a king and he made sure to go from door to door until he got the king's favour to consider the girl. He chose a husband for her and even told her not to complain, but to stay in that marriage because that was what other girls would have wished to have. *Monna o be a naganne gore a bone gore morwedi wa gagwe a tšewa ke monna wa maemo, gagolo kgoši, kgošana, le ge e le mohumi.*

The folktale above shows the determination of parents when they dream big for their children. The poor man in the tale *Mahlamaahlamolla* did not want his only girl to live and die in poverty. He was ready to do whatever to prepare a good future for his girl. The chief's kraal is known to be a place where commoners cannot come and go as they wish but this poor man managed to convince the guards and gained entry. The king as well forgot his subjects and requested him to bring his daughter whom he married without much questions. The marriage changed the man's life in many ways. Obviously he would not live in poverty again and his daughter was a queen just as he wished.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Obedience is such a good virtue but too much of it may be misleading. Men believed that women would never come out and take their rightful position in the world. Women no longer keep quite because they are aware they can change the world. Today we find women due to the immense power they yield have ventured into men's world of work, and they are doing perfectly well. Mohanty (1984:239) sums this up by saying that the exclusion of women from large areas of workforce

was achieved in two distinct ways. There were barriers to female employment, including employers who were unwilling to hire women, while husbands were unwilling to 'allow' their wives to work, and legislation that prohibited female labour from certain categories of work.

Many women were forced to remain in the house and look after the kids not because they were unable to work but due to cultural beliefs that women are a weaker sex, they have to be looked after. Working in the fields is one job that shows how powerful women are. This is evident when we look at life today where farming is a man's work. Today both men and women make a good living out of farming, with women farmers topping the list. Our country's justice system has seen growth in women judges and magistrates. To our surprise there men who are child-minders and good cooks just like women. This shows that women have never failed in any assignment but they were not given chance. Governments have put women at the helm of their systems because they have the ability to rule.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary

The study has showed that many folklorists who wrote folktales about girls and boys has always put much emphasis on girls as people who need constant supervision. Although these are tales are used to educate and mould, they are specifically used to mould girls to become better women in the society rather than preparing them to stand up for themselves in the face of the world. The girls are taught to rely on their husbands for everything even for their own securities. Rightfully we all know that man and women are entitled to equal rights and respect but this situation has prevailed for centuries where girls are directly dealt with and told to be good wives, and they are even told that divorce is taboo. This clearly shows that girls have been wrongly made to believe that they should not respond to this marred situation in a way that will satisfy them, a way that will make them happy but rather they always do things to satisfy other people around them.

In folktale male characters are portrayed as brave, sensitive and caring people when compared girls who are believed to be easily influenced, carelessly arrogant. One author feels that male characters are not only cast as breadwinners, but also as protectors of women and girls. Men and boys are therefore presented as the controllers of the destiny of society and capable of changing the course. In the light of the above statement it means women themselves are not able to decide their own destiny, they are accorded this lower status and their main territory is limited to their home and field, while men will venture out into the unknown to look for food. The reality of the matter is not that women cannot look really protect them, no, but it is the society in which they grow up makes them mistrust their abilities.

Women behavior and conduct will vary from one culture to the next but still it is

has not yet been recorded anywhere else in the African culture where girls are applauded for making their own decision about marriage. The research has highlighted that girls are always expected to do the will of parents even though the same parents have lived their own lives. In some few folktales we have seen that parental involvement is important but as guidance not to choose partners for their girl children. The importance of it goes hand in glove with The Word of God when it says that children should obey and respect their parents. Although one would argue why in the folktale tradition only girls are supposed to be submissive, another one would still argue that God has chosen man to be head of the family and woman is set to obey. Still on that one should not lose sight of the fact that obedience is always coupled with justice, where everybody should be given equal chances to decide how and with whom to spend this life.

## **5.2 Findings**

The researcher has realized that folktale girls have also accepted their lower status as community members and they even enjoy being in the background while their husbands do whatever they wish to. When one looks at the issue of arranged marriages, one may conclude that these girls have been brought up in such a way that they believe much less in themselves. Actually what happens in these marriages is that they only do it to satisfy their parents. In marriage they are expected to work hard, given proverb; 'mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo' (A woman is like a baboon, her hands are eaten). If men were strong enough as is claimed, they would be marrying women and working for them while these women beget children as the primary purpose of marriage. This being not the case, women will always sweat their energy out in the fields, with children tied to their backs and work for the very same man who is said to be taking care of these women.

One other important and common point in folktales is that every girl who ever made her decision to marry a man of her choice has never been successful. It would either be found that she married an ogre or a dangerous snake.

Remember, these were stories which were told to the girls when they grew up. Just because those were the only stories of that time, being told by their most respected parents, rich and poor, they really grew up with the belief that they should really adhere to rules, and behave exactly as the society expects them. Remember girls are basically regarded as a weaker sex; they are made to believe that they are children to their husbands and so they rely on their male counterparts for everything. Of course these authors know very well that women are really as naïve as they are portrayed by writers. They know that although women are not directly involved with matters involving the community, they are still regarded as an integral part of the decision-making because they are always consulted by their husbands behind closed doors. Therefore, they will agree with the idea that exclusion of women in many cultural activities is a deliberate attempt by society to message men's ego when it comes to the outside world. It gives men the chance to relate some ideas from their wives as if they were their own findings.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Girls in folktales are our central theme in this study, boys have been slightly looked at and it was discovered it is not true that girls are weak and dependent. One would recommend that future studies about folktale characters should look in the roles of boys too, to offer a better picture of constructive nature of this study. The researcher feels that girls should be given the opportunity to be themselves rather than live unhappily with the men they do not love. The new dispensation has come as a relief to many women because now they can exercise their right to choose who they want to live with. Even though the new era has shed much light in terms of education and has thus afforded women the chance to be educated, there are still some cultural beliefs which may not be done away with just like that. The issue of respect and obedience to parents still affords parents an upper hand when it comes to blessing their children's marriages. Respect and obedience for parents is a cornerstone in every African cultural group even if it may be practiced at different levels and ways of understanding, but it is there.

The issue of mentorship is also a good idea as long as the mentor is a level-headed individual. Anyway, grandparents are always top of the list in terms of preferences because they have been there; they have seen it all over the years. Their only mistake is that they are not so enlightened in terms of human rights violation therefore, girls should try and weigh options in whatever their advices.

Future studies need to be taken to examine how boys are constructed in the folktales. This will provide a balanced view on how society chooses select strategies to create and construct gender, roles and responsibilities.

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