

The Teachings of Death as Depicted in Tshivenda Folklore

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Abstract

Folklore, like all genres of literature in Tshivenda, teaches people morals in aspects such as love, death, economy, legal and life in general. Death is one of the themes found in folklore that teaches morals in humanity. The aim of this paper is to investigate the teachings of morals brought by death as depicted in Tshivenda folklore. The researcher would accomplish this by analysing more than two thousand proverbs, praise forms, praise names, riddles, idioms etc. from published and unpublished literary works. These aspects of folklore would be subjected to a sociological theories to find out how death is depicted in teachings of morals to the Vhavenda community.

Introduction

Folklore literature has been defined by The Encyclopedia Britannica Eleventh Edition Vol. 7 of 1911:45 as the lore chiefly of unlettered peoples transmitted by the word of mouth. This type of literature consists of prose and verse narrative, poems and songs, myths, drama, rituals, proverbs, riddles and the like. In this juncture the following will be dealt with i.e. proverbs, riddles and praise forms and praise forms or names as short forms. This literature exists in manuscripts and books and may be preserved exactly as authors or authors left it, even through this.

It may happen that the speaker or singer has heard it before and it carries a tradition that he has left from speakers and delivers it to a living audience. It may happen again that the listeners have heard this material many times before and that it has a vigorous life in the community, and they will see to it that he does not depart too far from traditions they know it. If this is acceptable, it could be repeated over and over again as long as it appeals to human lives both men and women.

Praise forms or praise names

Names of people may carry many meanings. A name is a word or group of words used to refer to an individual entity (real or imaginary); the name singles out this quality by directly pointing to it, not by specifying it as a member of a class (one of the important elements if naming process concerns the meaning and associates of the name). In most cases people may be given certain names that are good, likeable, and propitious names. Sometimes children are given bad names with the meaning of informing them or communicating ugly happenings, disagreeable or crippled. The purpose of such names is apostrophic names to make the child to be undesirable to demons.

Analysis of Tshivenda names depicting death

Mushin, (1999:14) indicated that places may be named according to historical events. According to him 'by historical events is meant the occurrence of something in life of a people. People or places in Venda are being named in commemoration of events such as listed below

The name *Mukandangalwo*. 'one walk with it (death)'

The name *Mukandangalwo* is given to both males and females. The name is literally translated as 'I walk with it'. It means the 'one who walk with it'. When the name is praised it states that *Mukangangalwo mupfa wa mulenzheni*. This means one who walks with it is a thorn in one's foot. One always walks with death like a person who is walking with a thorn pricking under one's foot

The name is means that death is something one walks with it. One should not run away from death because one is borne to die. One is given this name to refer to him that one should not wait that people are borne to die and not run away from it. Death is considered to be at every person like one who is walking on footpath who could be pricked by thorn anytime. The word is a compound formed by prefix- Mu- followed by the verb stem-*kanda*, followed by a preposition *nga* and followed by pronoun *-lwo* standing for *lufu* 'death'

The name *Aluimelwi*'One does not wait for it' (death)

The name may be given to both male and female. It means that 'one should not wait for it'. In this juncture when death come to you or threatened by anything which may cause death, one should run away and not to wait for the death to catch up. The name is given to a person to *be forewarned that one should not procrastinate if death is coming. In other words you should run away from death and not wait until death comes to you.*

The name *Musiwalwo*' on its (death) day'

The name *Musiwalwo* may be given to both male and female. It may be loosely translated as 'the day of death'. This means that the day of death one may do something unbecoming or if death is coming to a person it would not first report that it is coming. It just comes unexpectedly. There is no time which death could tell one that it is coming to fetch him or her. It just come without telling one whether that it was coming. The name is a compound formed by conjunction *musi* which refers to time followed by possessive concord *wa* followed by pronoun *-lwo* standing for death.

Proverbs referring to death

Musehane (1986:65) quoted Guma (1983:65) defining a proverb as a pithy sentences with the general bearing on life. It serves to express some homely truth or moral lesson in such an appropriate manner as to make one feel that no better words could have been used to describe the particular situation

Proverb *U tshi suma muhulu lufu u suma u tshi lu divha*'When reportint death to elderly person, do so knowingly'

The above mentioned proverb refers to death. It means that if you report death to an elderly person you should do so when knowing all the details. The elderly people are full of questions. They may ask when the person died, when and where is going to be buried. If you lack that matter you are forbidden to report because you will not have the facts. This proverb refers to any other matters in general. You must tell someone an issue that you understand and know all about it.

Proverb *Mutani wa lufu, hu dzulwa a siho*'The family of the deceased people get there after his/her death'

The proverb is literally means that you enter into a homestead after the owner has passed away. This means that many people enter the homestead after the death of the owner. Without death his services would not be considered but after the death of the owner of the homestead, men would be required to give assistance and therefore would enter the homestead.

Proverb *Muthu ifa hu sale dzina*'one dies leaving good name behind'

The above proverb is literally means that you should always do well so that when you die you should keep your name clean. This means one should leave behind a good name or history after their death. The proverb is encouraging people to do good things while still alive so that they could leave behind a clean name

Proverb *Lufu a lu rovhezwi*'Death cannot be challenged to prove a statement'

The above proverb means that one should not mock one who has death in the family because death does not choose people. It could still come to you as a family. Do not laugh at one who has death in a family.

Proverb *Lufu a lu sengiswi*'Death is not takento court'

No one should question about death. No one should question why death has visited one's family. Death does not specifically choose a person in order to punish him or her but it depends on the time. It may still come.

Proverb Lufu a lu taliwi 'Do not divorce death'

This proverb refers to one who was married to a person. If that person meets death one should not say he is no longer my relative because of marriage. It tells that one should not divorce death. When one's husband or wife is dead one should stay at the in-laws and must not go away. The proverb is warning young ladies that when their husbands die they should not go back to their parents' families. They must stay with the in-laws.

Proverb Lufu lu a vhidza lwo aravha khunda' Death lures one'

The proverb teaches one that if the time of dying has arrived one would have to die and no one would stop it. This proverb warns one who would be under the experienced doctor and question how should he die while he is under intensive care of experienced doctors. The answer is that if death comes to a person and it is his or her day of dying, no-one will stop it.

Proverb Lufu lu tanganywa nga thangu.'People meet during death rituals'

The proverb is loosely translated as the difference because of one's death, people who do not see eye to eye would meet when they go to a traditional doctor to go and find out what killed the person. The death of a family member may make people of the same family differ in certain issues. They would not visit each other. But according to Venda custom and tradition all members of the family should go together to a traditional doctor to find out what had killed the person. The proverb says that although people could differ, they would come together the day when they go together to the traditional doctor since all members of the family should go together without one staying behind.

Proverb Lufu lu shaya sia'Death does not take side'

The proverb is loosely interpreted as death or accident is not meant for specific people. When death after death follows in a family one may think what wrong I did. One may question oneself that if I had committed any wrongdoing may God forgive me because everything terrible is coming on my way. Death does not choose people for a reason. If death is coming to one's family it would come without anybody hindering its coming.

Proverb Lufu a lu sindelwi mbuvha 'One cannot prepare for death'

According to Venda custom and tradition when one undertakes a journey one should wash clothes. One should prepare provision to take along. When on the way one would enjoy oneself with the provision. The remaining provision would be left for the relatives where one is going to visit. In this proverb one is told that if one is dying one would have no time of preparation. In other words an accident or death when it comes to people one does not have time to prepare for it. The proverb teaches us that we should be prepared to die any time.

Proverb Lufu lwa swina ndi lwau 'The death of one's enemy is yours'

The proverb is loosely translated as the death of the enemy is still your death. Although death or an accident falls on your enemy one should be concerned. Death is the enemy of human beings. Death is an enemy to every one. When your enemy meets death you should be concerned since you are also a human being.

Proverb Lufu ndi gwengo li hwengaho thungo dzothe, a lu taluli 'Death does not take sides'

Death is loosely translated as a curved arrow or spear blade inserted into a short haft and used to smoothen the inside of a wooden vessels which kills people everywhere in large numbers without choosing people. According to this proverb, death is seen coming to every body without selecting. It comes to everyone.

Proverb Lufu ndi khofhe' Death is sleeping'

According to the Tshivenda culture and tradition death comes unexpectedly. Death is like sleep i.e. it comes suddenly, unexpectedly without any warning. Death comes anytime to a person.

Proverb Lufu ndi mueni 'Death is a visitor'

The proverb is loosely translated as death is like a visitor. A visitor comes any time of the day. So; death is like a visitor because it comes anytime without invitation. The proverb teaches us that there is no time of preparation for death because it may come to one at any time.

Proverb *Lufu ndi nama ya ditilili*'Death is difficult'

An accident or dearth is difficult to accept like a piece of meat which is hard to chew. One should just accept death of an accident since one can not change it

Idioms referring to death

An idiom is a phrase which means something different from the meanings of the separate words. In this case the idiom referring death as subject under scrutiny was established. Death can be depicted in idioms and the following are examples

- (a) *U sia vhathu*-literal meaning he/she left the people-died
- (b) *U raha bakete*- to kick the bucket-died
- (c) *U nala vhuswa*-to stop doing something because of having taken offence; to refuse porridge- died

Conclusion

The proverbs are diverse in Tshivenda and they show different meanings such as death. It was found that proverbs, praise form, praise names, riddles and idioms from published and unpublished literary work depicted the teachings of death in our Tshivenda community.

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