Comparative Studies of German and Kuki Fairytales

Nengpinem Haokip

Abstract: This study attempts to analyze two different cultures of fairy tales—German fairy tales and Kuki tribal tales. Comparisons between the fairy tales of other countries and communities are valuable. Fairy tales, by their nature, celebrate diversity. By experiencing stories from different cultures, one can discover valuable insights into another culture's values, beliefs, history, practices, and customs, which have been used in everyday life as communication, learning, and entertainment tools. They reveal the gap between truth and falsehood in our society. The study aims to extend folklore studies in Germany and India, particularly focusing on the "peripheral" literature from the Kuki community in the Northeastern region of India. It explores the similarities and differences in motifs, characters, mysticism, and various cultural connotations about both cultural groups. Since these two cultural groups are not historically related, a comparative study will be useful in understanding which motives are culturally determined and which are universal.

Keywords: Literature, Cultural Area, Comparative Studies, Fairy Tales, Oral Stories.

I. INTRODUCTION

Storytelling has been an oral tradition ever since humans learned to communicate. It has been a predominant form of expressing human emotions, imagination, and creativity for years. There are many types of stories that represent various types of imaginative ideas: epics, poem stories, ballads, fairy tales, and folk tales. Tales have been told in our everyday lives, and they have influenced us, remaining alive even today. Fairy tales can be understood as an important part of literature, thus representing the culture of a community or a country. They have been shared in every society to entertain, educate, and preserve culture and have been used in everyday life as tools for communication, learning, and entertainment [3] (Blackburn, 2008).

The fairy tale is probably the most reworked and rewritten/re-read genre among all literary types in the world, whether for children or adults. Moral and philosophical values are embedded in fairy tales. In fairy tales, there is generally always a conflict between good and evil, virtue and vice, rich and poor, magic and skill, justice and injustice, old and young, weak and strong. But the good, the just, the virtuous, the truthful, and the strong always overcome their adversaries and triumph in the end. This leaves an impression on the young mind about what to choose in life and what to reject [7] (Lüthi, 1962).

Generally, when we hear or read the phrase "once upon a time" or "long, long ago," we immediately and naturally think that we are about to hear a fairy tale. We are predisposed to listen and read in a particular way, registering metaphors in our brain so that they make sense and we can replicate them in our way and in our own time. When we hear or read "Little Red Riding Hood," "Cinderella," "Hansel and Gretel," "Bluebeard," or any of the other well-known classical fairy tales, we know immediately what is being implied, even though we may not know the exact, original, or authentic text. It is almost as if certain fairy tales were stored in our brains and memories and have evolved as we humans have evolved. But this is not entirely the case, and not all human beings are predisposed and configured to process the fairy tale as if it were innate. Few people would argue, however, that the fairy tale has become a very specific genre in our lives and has inserted itself in inexplicable ways so that many of us try, even without knowing it, to make a fairy tale out of our lives.

II. ANALYSIS

A fairy tale, or *Märchen* in German, is defined as a wonder with a strong component that satisfies several personal needs, including fantasy and fulfillment. The characters and motifs of fairy tales are simple and real (e.g., poverty, sibling love, or rivalry). The stories feature heroes and heroines, wicked stepmothers, fairy godmothers, magical helpers, and often talking animals like frogs, foxes, or birds. They also include prohibitions and the breaking of those prohibitions. A fairy tale typically involves a series of motifs or episodes, unfolding in an unreal world without a definite locality or specific creatures, and is filled with the marvelous. In this "never-never land," humble heroes defeat adversaries, succeed in kingdoms, and marry princesses [8].

Fairy tales exist in both oral and literary forms. The oral tradition of the fairy tale predates written expression. Tales were told or enacted dramatically rather than written down and were handed down from generation to generation. Literary fairy tales, on the other hand, are written stories that many authors have composed in the fairy tale form. Literary and oral fairy tales freely exchange plots, motifs, and elements with one another [9] (Thompson, 1955).

The fairy tale is characterized by its structure. There are certain initial formulas, such as "Once upon a time," and the ending is often formulated with a formulaic phrase, e.g., "…and if you have not died, then you are still alive today." The fairy tale is notable for not indicating a fixed space or time in the plot. Most of the time, the laws of nature and causality that prevail in the real world are suspended. For example, it is not uncommon for animals or objects in a fairy tale to speak.

Key elements in fairy tales include:

- The figure or role of animals
- The forest
- The stepmother

- ▪ The triumph of good over evil

It becomes clear that fairy tales work with polarizations, meaning that there are no gradations between the characteristics of a person. The characters are either poor or rich, good or bad, beautiful or ugly, brave or cowardly, etc. Notably, the positive characteristics are often attributed to people of lower origins. The actions, locations, props, and colors in fairy tales are stereotypical. The plot typically involves a natural order that is first disrupted and then restored.

III. SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

This study attempts a comparative analysis of fairy tales from the West and the East. It will examine the German and Kuki tales from a comparative perspective [5] (Haokip, 2016). Specifically, this study will focus on the motives of fairy tales, their approach in both German and Kuki tales, the role of fairy tales in children's lives, an overview of the fairy tale genre, and the psychological meanings behind fairy tales. The fairy tales chosen for analysis will come from both German and Kuki traditions. This study will analyze the tales from both structural and psychological perspectives.

As we know, every fairy tale begins with a deficiency or a crisis, either overt or sometimes hidden. Fairy tales often share a common structure, where the plot revolves around difficulties that need to be overcome. This work aims to highlight the similarities and differences in fairy tales. The moral lessons in some fairy tales are conveyed in various ways. Every fairy tale follows a particular pattern, and although the way they are told varies, they always fulfill a specific function. Some fairy tales have strong morals to facilitate learning. Through structural and psychological theories, one can interpret deeper levels of meaning in these fairy tales. The theories of Bruno Bettelheim and Vladimir Propp will be applied to the analysis in this study. Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* is one of the most significant works in the study of fairy tales. The study will also focus on the role these tales play in our lives, particularly in the lives of children. To analyze and focus on the form and structure of both sets of tales, this study will draw upon Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* to examine the basic plot components of these tales and identify their simplest irreducible narrative elements [2] (Bettelheim, 1976).

By analyzing these tales, this study will reveal both similarities and differences, as every culture or society has its fairy tales shaped by its time and context. Therefore, fairy tales can be understood as familiar objects within their cultural setting. Comparisons between fairy tales from different countries and communities are valuable. Motivation in the context of fairy tales plays an important role, not only for children, as these tales evoke many emotional responses and stimulate the imagination. This study aims to extend the field of folklore studies in Germany and India, particularly focusing on the "peripheral" literature of the Northeastern regions of India. It will examine the similarities and differences in motives, characters, mysticism, and the various cultural connotations present in both cultural groups. Since these two cultural groups are not historically related, a comparative study will be useful in understanding what culturally determined motives are and what are universal

ones. The study will also address the missing aspects of understanding folktales from indigenous cultures compared to those of dominant cultures [9] (Propp, 1968).

This research will contribute to new perspectives in German folklore studies and foster further academic exchange between India and Germany by examining new and lesser-known folktales from India.

A. Concept of Happiness or Sadness in German and Kuki FairyTales

Generally, in fairy tales, when there is sadness, there is always a happy ending or a great resolution. There is also a lesson that one can learn after reading or hearing a fairy tale. Life in fairy tales often seems unfair and cruel, but it still retains some form of internal logic. Without a doubt, happy endings are among the most popular elements of fairy tales. After facing all possible and impossible troubles, the heroine or hero of the fairy tale typically defeats the enemies, achieves their goals, and lives happily ever after. However, in some stories, one can also find sad endings.

On a deeper level, by reading fairy tales and realizing that the characters are facing problems that seem impossible to overcome and then conquer, both children and adults can find the courage and vigor to face challenges in life, holding on to the hope that everything will work out in the end.

Deep, dark forests and woods are common elements in fairy tales, often serving a specific purpose in the story. In the German fairy tale *Hansel and Gretel* or the Kuki tale *Dapa Chon*, both sets of characters are abandoned in the forest. Lost in this confusing place, they must face great difficulties and overcome them. In Kuki tales, the hero, Dapa, is also smart and brave. To survive, he must develop initiative and realize that the only way to salvation lies in intelligent planning and action. He tactfully pierces the demon with his spear, and the demon dies.

In many fairy tales, the story begins with the death of the mother. For example, in *Cinderella*, this event highlights the emotional state of a child who experiences too little maternal closeness, either because the mother is absent or because the mother cannot provide explicit maternal influence. The effects of this can extend into adult life, as seen in a grown woman—the feeling that the image of Cinderella suggests: being poor and vulnerable, not being loved by anyone, not having the strength to stand up for oneself, and being relegated to a place in life in the ashes. One day, Cinderella is visited by a fairy who transforms her rags into a beautiful dress, enabling her to go to the royal ball. At the ball, Cinderella meets the prince, who falls in love with her at first sight. The prince searches for Cinderella, eventually finds her, and they marry and live happily ever after [1] (Ashliman, D.L, 2005).

The Kuki tale *Khupting le Ngambom* has a sad ending, emphasizing the moral that those who cannot keep their promises will lose everything. Because of the promises made by the mothers, Khupting dies, as the mothers are unable to fulfill their promises [6] (Kuki, 2004).

Kuki tales not only validate beliefs, such as those reflected in *Khupting and Ngambom* but also provide a release for the community's fantasies and aspirations. The tale is

characterized by magical elements. In this story, there is love and yearning between a girl who loses her earthly life and her living lover. After their deaths, the immortal lovers are reunited in the heavenly realm. This reflects the belief in Kuki society about the afterlife—if they cannot meet or fulfill their relationship in the earthly world, they will still reunite in another world. This tale demonstrates the importance of keeping hope alive! [4] (Goshwami, 1985).

B. Problem

Every tale presents a lack or a crisis, either in an open or sometimes hidden form. Each tale addresses a different problem and resolves it. For example, tales often begin with the death of the mother, followed by the arrival of a stepmother or other inherent problems that the characters must overcome. In short, these tales often follow a common structure. The plot typically revolves around difficulties that need to be overcome. Fairy tales do not merely juxtapose good and bad characters; they serve a different purpose. They do not build character by promoting choices between good and bad but by giving the child hope that even the most vulnerable can succeed in life.

C. Love

Love plays a significant role in fairy tales. For example, in *Snow White*, the prince carries her off, inert in her coffin, and it is by chance that she coughs up the poisonous piece of apple stuck in her throat, coming back to life. In *Sleeping Beauty*, she awakens only because her lover kisses her. In *Cinderella*, the degradation of time ends when the slipper fits her. In each tale, the rescuer demonstrates love in some form, whether through romantic love or sibling love. For instance, *Hansel and Gretel* succeeded because of their combined efforts. Each tale teaches us a different moral lesson. (Bettelheim)

D. Moral

Fairy tales are not just children's stories. They are stories in which children, adolescents, and even adults learn how society is regulated. In fairy tales, social norms are conveyed through memorable examples. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the siblings were able to conquer themselves and overcome obstacles, an experience that helped them mature and rely on their intelligence and initiative to solve life's problems. Moral stories are those that impart values and virtues to young ones. Most parents read moral stories to their children to help them grow up to be honest, courageous, and smart enough to face life. These small stories heard during childhood help shape a child into a generous human being. In *Cinderella*, being a good person with a kind heart will always lead to success.

Similarly, the Kuki tale *Khupting le Ngambom* from Northeast India depicts different interpretations—whether a sad or happy ending. The moral emphasizes that those who cannot keep their promises will lose everything. In this story, the heroine dies because the mothers failed to fulfill their promises. Some fairy tales have strong morals to help people learn better. In *Khupting le Ngambom*, even though Khupting dies, the story does not end there. It concludes when Khupting and Ngambom are reunited after their deaths, reflecting the belief in "life after death." Even if their relationship cannot be fulfilled in earthly life, they are together in another world.

Love seems to have no barriers; not even death can separate the fibers of love. Two different and opposite worlds cannot control love.

This shows that fairy tales often follow a common structure—"the happy ending." Their functions may vary in different situations, but the essential functions remain the same when broken down into parts. Psychologists like Freud and Bettelheim have analyzed the hidden elements of fairy tales through psychoanalysis. This method allows one to interpret the deep feelings of people. Fairy tales provide symbols that can be clearly understood through psychoanalysis. Through this lens, many symbols and elements are brought to light and analyzed.

IV. CONCLUSION

The study will chiefly rely on published fairy tales in both German and Kuki cultures. Culture shapes how people habitually think and significantly impacts the way individuals perceive the world. As socio-historians and folklorists maintain, each variant of a particular story carries its meaning within a given cultural context—interpretations of texts are determined by the cultural context in which they are formulated. This study attempts to understand how fairy tales align with the cultural realities of the communities in which they are told, i.e., in German and Kuki societies.

Fairy tales reflect the glories of various cultures, traditions, and histories of the people. Over time, they become refined, containing the morals, philosophies, values, and wisdom of the people. Comparing tales from different societies offers the possibility of confirming multiple categories—distribution, structure, style, and content. Both oral and written materials will be analyzed concerning their social, historical, and religious backgrounds, as well as the interplay between literature and oral narratives. The findings and interpretations will emerge from the specific details observed by the researcher. This research aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meanings and "definitions of the situation and context" presented in the fairy tales of both cultures studied.

DECLARATION STATEMENT

I must verify the accuracy of the following information as the article's author.

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AUTHOR'S PROFILE

Nengpinem Haokip, did her B.A. and M.A. in Manipur University and Delhi University. She has currently submitted her PhD from Jawaharlal Nehru University and is awaiting her viva. She has attended and presented many papers at National and International Seminars/Conferences. She has also published many research papers in UGC-approved and peer-reviewed or refereed journals. Her specialization includes Literature, Comparative literature, Folklore studies, humanities, and Social Science.