

Regaining the Decay of Human Values

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Abstract

The myriad of ethnic and sub-ethnic groups in Indonesia causes similarly numerous creations, communication, and performance of folklore. Today, however, tales which are classified in verbal lore and believed as people's fictional works are decaying since almost all tales still use local-regional languages, which generally have been unpopular. Furthermore, modern lifestyle, which strongly relied on technology-based media, are impossible to avoid. To trace back the initial function of tales: delivering human values, therefore, two Javanese children's tales entitled '*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*', 'Be Kind to Animal', and '*Ketemu Rajane Ulo*', 'Meeting with the King of Snake', are scrutinized. Upon interpreting these stories in accordance with their function, content analysis method is applied to answer the very common question about the usefulness of learning humanity. By discovering the dense moral-ethical lessons as the root of human virtues in these exemplified tales, it can be asserted that tales for children are not definitely old-fashioned because they do not merely connect to the past but represent the heart of the present life. In conclusion, teachings on human virtues through fiction is influential to children's character building.

Keywords: tales; moral message; human virtues; character building

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Introduction

As one of literary works which originally takes form of oral tradition, tale has been used to spread thoughts, social critics, hegemony, and moral message ever since a long time ago. Tales generally are in the form of short stories and, to a larger extent, they are used to hand down the lessons of human values. In etymology perspective, as a part of verbal lore, Klarer (2004) explains that tale is derived from the word 'tell' as a reflection of the verbal dimension within the work. They are the conventional means to deliver moral teachings for children to plant basic traits of human qualities, such as love, honesty, and good sense of certain culture. And, children as a ray of hope for new generation are suitable to be targeted audiences.

As a literary work, tale does not only function as an entertainment but a means to disseminate moral values, which are believed as life guidance, as well. In accordance to meet its goal, Danandjaya (2007) has a similar stance of tale as an entertainment which reflects truth, moral value, or even satire. In other words, tale is not an exclusively artistic work of the writer's imagination, but it teaches about life and living, as well as human experience and humanity. In line with this idea, Demott (in Judy, 1981: 56) states that "the whole scope of language, which includes literature, has to do with individual feeling, human response, human time, as these can be known through the written expression ... at many levels".

Considering that the root of this sort of literary work is verbal lore, it is not surprising, then, that Indonesia has numerous tales. Indonesia's many regions, ethnics, and even sub-ethnic groups are configuration of its diversity, giving characteristics particular to each society, community, or group. Indonesian human values, therefore, can be dug out from all the cultural manifestation of these groups. However, since tales signify the stories from very olden days which are told verbally, they rely on native language to provide two-way communication. Each ethnic group has its own way to express its traditional culture through tales which mostly, of course, are delivered through local languages. This becomes a crucial point because today, only few Indonesians comprehend their native ethnic languages. The striking example is Javanese language, which is alienated in its own world. Javanese people dominate more than 65% of the total population of Indonesia. Though, less than a half of this number do not completely master Javanese language. This problem is as complicated as the attempt to determine the number of Javanese people who are exactly 'typical Javanese' (Suseno, 1983: 3). The fading away of the mastery of local language is also influenced by Indonesian Language or *Bahasa Indonesia*, which is enacted as official national language. This phenomenon brings about the fact that most of public schools held by the government which should have more responsibility to preserve the cultural root, compared to private schools, do not include native language to local curriculum. Whereas, local language is an elegant medium to construct a good communication between tales which contain moral-ethical teachings and their audiences or readers. The means of this communication becomes the soul of character building, particularly when this kind of fictional works are handed out for children.

The increasing trend of unpopular local language among Javanese is worsened by the interference of global language, English, and other languages which are very popular for the today's Indonesians such as Japanese, Korean, or Mandarin. Additionally, the notion of globalization which is associated with modern, and of local which is

associated with traditional (Nygren, 1999) have turned over Indonesian's world view about culture. The dichotomy of global and local constructs modern lifestyle which is more focusing on tangible matters. Instead of preserving old fashioned culture underlining human virtues as intangible values, Indonesian young generation and children are most likely to be interested in popular culture rather than those of folk culture. To a certain degree, the role of Javanese tales for children, today, has been taken over by movies of American Children's heroes, cartoon or anime.

To reestablish traditional values which mostly existed in any kind of folklore, a lot of cultural agents and activists who are concerned with local culture are continuously reinventing and doing efforts to preserve them. Facing the unstopped current of modern concept, they transform, and even in some instances translate tales into easily acceptable language in written form. As a result, ethnic tales representing verbal lore which are initially inherent with oral tradition recently can be found in written form; though some still use native languages. This paper, therefore, tries to uncover moral-ethical lessons by researching two children tales published in '*Panyebar Semangat*'¹, a Javanese weekly magazine.

Literature Review and Research Method

Moral teaching itself has close relation to human social, abstract, and emotional intelligence, respectively. Social intelligence, according to Thorndike (1920) and Goleman (1977), is the ability to establish mutual understanding amongst human beings which drives them to act wisely and bond a relationship between one and the others, in which the intelligence itself consists of interpersonal intelligence and intrapersonal intelligence. Human uses abstract intelligence as one of the tools to absorb moral teaching through a fictional story. In the context of tale, moral teaching is also a tool to improve emotional intelligence which affects the success in daily life and further trains human to be emphatic in a sense. These individuals would be capable to take in hidden and implicit social signals in order to give a sense of sensibility towards others' conditions. Additionally, the basic emotional intelligence cannot be acquired instantly as it requires a long process of learning from the environment. In this account, moral teachings are very important for toddlers. They will get used to be nurtured as they grow to be emotionally intelligent children who are sensible and capable of using their experience to solve a problem.

To explore the meaning of moral messages in two selected Javanese tales, '*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*' and '*Ketemu Rajane Ula*', text-oriented approach is used since it requires the elements from literary works, as well as the relation between each element, its contribution to reach an aesthetic objective and meaning as a whole (Nurgiyantoro, 2012: p.37). Plot becomes the basis of the study, because, as asserted by Perrine 1987: 41), "it helps enrich the meaning of the story" based on its theme. Together with plot, there will be "the logical interaction of various thematic elements of a text which leads to change of original situation at outset of narrative" (Klarer, 2004: 15). Plot, therefore, is the key point to connect the events' causalities within a theme, the relationship between the characters, thus the implicit message of the story

¹ *Panyebar Semangat* issued its first publication in September 02, 1933, which was pioneered by the late Dr. Soetomo, a national prominent figure during Indonesian revolutionary era. Today this magazine is not as popular as in 40-50 years ago, it still exists but the readers are only limited to certain Javanese community.

can be traced. Plot of the tale is unique for its unchangeable root from time to time yet varies in many kinds of versions. Jones (2002) underlines that “the plot outline is regarded as the defining feature of tales...” In turn, “plot outline can be used to define tales”. Furthermore, the events within the plot sequence of a tale is used to bring up themes in daily life, specifically moral value.

Life and moral values in literature is usually delivered indirectly and implicitly, and in tale as such. It is the reason why Endraswara (2008: 161-162) argues that analyzing a literary work using content analysis method must fulfill the term which includes the values reflecting positive message to the audiences or the readers. Content analysis research in literature is originated from the axiom that the writers want to deliver message cryptically to the readers. The important aspect of this analysis is how to explain the messages and how the result is implied to the audiences or the readers as well. Accordingly, to unravel human virtues in the two selected children short stories, the linkage between plot and theme built up by the characters becomes the main concern of the study.

In applying its function to spread moral lessons, tale is apt to use figurative language. The relationship between the function of tale and its native language, which play its predominant role as conventional medium, is impossible to ignore. Accordingly, Jones confirms that tale represents the world “(both internally, the world of individual psyche, and externally, the world of society and cosmos) through the poetic devices of exaggeration, metonymy, simile, and metaphor” (2002, p. 12). In short, tale uses metaphor and other figurative language style to stir the emotions of the readers. Through this perspective, the objects of the study are observed in order to find moral lessons within the story and how figurative language works in delivering this human value.

Results and Discussions

Tales attract children’s attention because it has a very intimate link with their daily lives as human being. Indirectly, tales promotes a kind of initiation towards the children’s nature of thought to enter their space of imagination and magic. The tales that specifically meant for children, as it was suggested by Spalding and Hare (1966:13), are stories which embodies happiness and teaches wisdom. Furthermore, they also highlighted that God engages with human being through the attraction towards other people. Philosophically, tales serve as notes about many kinds of things done by human. This means tales teaches the truth through the examples that nurturing good characters will be more precious compared to hosting bad tempers.

Children’s stories entitled ‘*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*’ or ‘Be Kind to Animal’ and ‘*Ketemu Rajane Ula*’ or ‘Meeting with the King of Snakes’ present characters using personification technique. The composition depicts communication between young boys and animals which convey human values, explicitly and implicitly, to the readers. The characterization technique of personified animals is interesting for children because these characters are given human qualities; they can be crying, speaking, or expressing various feelings and emotions. Therefore, when morality plays intended to teach lessons present qualities such as love and good sense as human character, employing personified animal characters can give very dramatic impressions.

Discussing moral lessons is putting them within the frame of culture. As a fundamental guidance for people in their lives, values – the root of culture are constructed by norms and beliefs. Successively, they are actualized in their behavior, style, perception, and so forth. Then, these manifestations can be in the form of products of culture such as the two tales selected to be analyzed in this study. ‘*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*’ or ‘Be Kind to Animal’ and ‘*Ketemu Rajane Ula*’ or ‘Meeting with the King of Snakes’ (Fig. 1 and 2), have transformed into a more acceptable performance for children of this era; from oral version into written form. The illustration is also repacked in modern colorful pictures to attract children’s attention.



Figures 1 and 2 (left-right): *Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*; *Ketemu Rajane Ula*

(1) Learning about Benevolence
in ‘*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*’ or ‘Be Kind to Animal’

The story of ‘*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*’, tells about a naughty young boy named Bayu who not only like torturing animals, especially birds, but also killing them to be eaten. He is abusive, treating the birds as his prey, and never listens to his Mother’s advice to stop killing animals. One morning, after killing two birds he seeks another target. From his hiding spot, he successfully hit one of the wings of a flying bird with his catapult until it falls.

*Bayu enggal-enggal nututi lan ora suwe blekok mau banjur kecekel.
Bayu banjur njupuk lading arep di enggo nyembeleh
Sikile blekok diidak lan endhase dicekeli karo tangan kiwo.*
(Hugo, “Narayana”: 2015)

This excerpt shows how Bayu ill-treats the victim. Cruelly, he always prepares to kill the bird with a knife “*njupuk lading nggo nyembeleh*”. His feet and his hands are used very aggressively to cause his hunted birds powerless, “*sikile ... diidak lan endhase dicekeli karo tangan*”. When Bayu steps on the legs of the last bird he knocked down and wants to cut its neck, the paralyzed bird asks him to spare her life for the sake of her little chicks. The bird implores;

*Hei... manungsa! Apa kowe ora mesakake marang aku?
Ooo mesakake temenan anakku isih padha cilik-cilik.
Yen ora ana mbokne mesthi bakal mati. Awit durung bisa mabur.
Oh, culno aku, aku arep ngloloh anak-anakku.* (Hugo, “Narayana”: 2015)

(Oh ... young boy! Don't you take pity on me?
Please love me, I have little kids. If their mother does not come back to the nest, they
will die. They have not been able to fly yet.
Please release me. I want to feed them).

Bayu is very surprised, knowing a bird can speak like human. He stops acting for a moment, looks at the bird's weeping eyes. He feels confused when he obscurely listens to the bird moans,

Oolah ngger, embokmu arep dipateni. (Hugo, "Narayana": 2015)
(My beloved kids, your mother will be killed).

The bird's hopeless aside makes Bayu cancel his attempt to kill her. He leaves the wounded, limping bird alone and goes home bringing two dead birds that he wants to fry.

After sprawling the dead birds on the ground, however, he hesitates because he remembers the grieving bird earlier, and about her sad eyes looking at him. He also anguishes on how the bird tried hard to fly but it is difficult to do because of her wounded wing. Suddenly, Bayu imagines his mother who has not arrived home yet until late in the evening is bleeding in one part of her body; an imagination that metaphorized the broken wing of the bird he hurt. At the same time, one of his neighbors conveys a message that his mother has got an accident. However, she is safe in hospital and will come soon. Bayu feels immense regret for his terrible deeds and begins crying. Spontaneously, he decides to bury the two dead birds instead of frying and eating them as his favorite dish. Thus, since then, he promises to stop abusing animals anymore.

From the plot of the story in '*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*' or 'Be Kind to Animal', children as audiences or readers can learn implicit moral teachings about benevolence. It is shown how a bird, a personified animal, also has a duty towards her chicks as a mother has for her vulnerable children. The bird reminds the young boy who almost killed her to do his self-reflection: what will be happening if a mother dies during her babies still need tender care. The bird also asks him to keep in mind that one must not do something cruel to fellow creations of God. When he is musing over his terrible deeds, the condition of the suffering bird with her broken wing repeatedly appears. The bird's aside also keeps on echoing. All his bad experiences haunt him while he is upset, waiting for his mother who in fact got an accident, as if he watches the replay of the misery scene on and on. The mourning day teaches the boy about '*karma*'² which is, for Javanese, believed as the basis of human destiny.

(2) Protecting the Weak in '*Ketemu Rajane Ula*' or 'Meeting with the King of Snakes'

In contrast to the first story, the main human character in this tale is a gentle and tender, caring young boy named Ari. One day, on the way home from school, he has

² *Karma*, also *karmapala*, is a law of cause and effect which not only attributed to humans but also applied as an absolute law in nature.

saved a little snake because it was beaten by rowdy boys. By his sweet words, Ari successfully stops those boys who want to continue beating and trying to kill the fainting snake. Patiently, he tells them that the snake is also God's creation, "*Iki ula ya umate Gusti Allah*", like other creatures in the world.

After placing the little snake which is almost suffocated to death near the creek of the rice field, Ari ensures himself that the snake will be able to move because it will touch water and can retrieve consciousness. Then, he goes home and, as an obedient boy, he does his daily routine: greeting his mom, washing hands, having lunch, praying, and taking nap. But during his short sleep, he dreams of meeting a giant snake who introduces itself as the King of Snakes and tells his appreciation to Ari for helping his young kid.

Le ... Ari. Aja wedi, aku iki rajane Ula.

Aku ngaturake panuwun kowe wis nulungi anakku awan mau.

Mulane awakmu bakal tak wenehi hadiah sing mbok senengi. (Junaedi: "Narayana", 2016)

(Ari ... love. Don't be afraid, I am the King of Snakes.

I want to convey my gratitude because you have saved my kid this morning.

So, I want to give you a nice present that you like).

The King of Snakes repeats his words dearly. Not only giving material things as a token of his gratitude, the King of Snakes also kisses Ari's cheek and gives him wise advice as well.

Le, dakdongakno awakmu mbesuk dadi wong sing kasil.

Welingku, awakmu kudu ajeg njaga sesambungan kang apik marang sapattha-padtha, senajan kuwi mung kewan. Tulung – tinulung (Junaedi: "Narayana", 2016)

(Dear young boy. I pray for your future, you will be a successful man.

I would like to remind you, however, to keep good relationship with others;

Even though they are only animals, help them ...)

The above excerpt confirms that within a tale there is a couple of moral messages. Snake is similar with other creatures and human being. As a strong, powerful animal before a weak boy, his understanding and good temper are the embodiment of qualified human character. This is reflected from the utterance of the King of Snakes to Ari which uses mixed high and middle level of Javanese language. The high-level Javanese language of the clause "*Aku ngaturake panuwun ...*", signifies how to respect others. The essence of respect is not merely based on a hierarchy of superior-inferior, elderly-young, or high-low position in social status. The King of Snakes indirectly teaches Ari about the values of appreciation and respect which is not only served by children toward the elderly, but the elderly also has responsibility to respect the ones who helped him, even though the helper is far younger and weaker like Ari.

For saving his kid's life, the King of Snakes presents Ari a wonderful gift. When Ari wakes up bewildered, he finds out the valuable reward from the King of Snakes under his pillow. The important point is not the reward, but the kind words of the King of Snakes. He gives a compliment that Ari is a tender and caring boy. He, then, advises

that once Ari grows up to be a successful man, he should always keep helping and not harming others, as long as they do not disturb them, on the basis that they are all equally God's creation. This advice underlines that human virtues is universal. The elderly should take care of the young ones, give thanks when they do a good deed, and educate them to behave well.

'Eyes are the window of the soul' is the most suitable saying to describe how the little snake looked at Ari miserably as if it wants to thank him. Whereas the King of Snakes feels indebted on behalf of his kid and tries to pay for it by giving the most appropriate reward for the main character, Ari. The King of Snakes is a personified animal whom, with its gentle and soothing words, has taught manners, respect, and gesture of gratitude. Those are very heartfelt moral teachings which can be very effective to dispel violence, especially killing.

Both of the tales discussed in this study, '*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*' or 'Be Kind to Animal', and '*Ketemu Rajane Ulo*' or 'Meeting with the King of Snakes', clearly depicts how the basis of human values are manifested in daily activity. The consequence of bad deeds is punishment and the result of good deeds is reward. Significantly, these two tales answer the fundamental questions about human virtues in terms of the character of a man, namely: (1) What is the right thing to do? and (2) What is the best way to live? The most important point to achieve human virtues is "understanding" and "good-temper" (Barnes and Kenny, 2014:49). From the first story, children as audiences or readers can learn moral teachings from benevolence. The main character, Bayu, gets '*karma*' because he acts cruelly toward the mother bird, whose chicks still need her. This correlates closely with the subsequent scene that his mother got an accident. As the Javanese proverb says '*ngunduh wohing pakarti*'³, it means whatever gained by humans in their life are the fruition of their own deeds. That particular experience brings Bayu to an enlightenment about the importance of a mother towards her children, and makes him realizes his mistake. Different from the young boy in the first story, the main character in the second story 'Meeting with the King of Snakes', Ari, is the best example how human should act properly, "have activities". He also represents the ideals of how humans, since their childhood, should polish their heart and mind through the deeds in their daily life. In line with the concept of ethics underscored by Aristotle (Dupre, 2003: 20), that "the good man is the active exercise of his soul's faculties in conformity with the excellence or virtue ... moreover this activity must occupy a complete lifetime", Ari is on the right track to be qualified human being because since childhood, he has trained his awareness towards human virtues.

Conclusions

Visiting '*Sing Welas Asih Marang Kewan*' and '*Ketemu Rajane Ulo*', which unquestionably contains moral lessons, basically is re-rooting Indonesian traits that today are in the state of decaying. This study is not aiming to romanticize the past, but it is an effort to reveal the reciprocal result between the harsh deed and the kind one, that represents cultural heritage, in this case, as fictions – Javanese folktale. The personification method used in the stories discussed underlines how fiction works transmit moral-ethical teachings. Children can learn how they should actualize human

³ This wise word is the same as the saying 'what you reap is what you sow'.

values in their lives. Upholding the values of politeness, respect, and keeping living in harmony with all creatures is the key point of the ‘understanding’ and ‘good temper’.

Regaining human values, which in Indonesia today is in the state of decaying because the modern lifestyle generally puts aside the important role of local-regional language that basically embodies cultural identity, is concerning about the future. The ideal human characters that have been implicitly dispersed through the two exemplified Javanese tales are universal; not only for Javanese but also for Indonesian. If the teachings of human virtues are left in dying condition or even extinction only because of language constraint, it will pose a very risky impact toward children as the golden future generation. They will be alienated from the sense of humanity.

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