



Representation of Cultural Diversity in India: Reading A.K. Ramanujan's Folktales from India

Dr. Rabindranath Sarma^{1*}, Jubinarosa. S. S²

^{1*}(Associate Professor) Department of Anthropology and Tribal Studies Central University of Jharkhand, India

²(PhD Research Scholar) Department of Anthropology and Tribal Studies Central University of Jharkhand, India

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ABSTRACT

This study establishes the continuing power, diversity and vitality of the Indian folklore as shown in a few of A. K Ramanujan's stories from the collection entitled Folktales of India. The stories comprise an assortment of folktales from numerous Indian languages. Additionally, they are an amazing cultural relic representing oral traditions from several Indian languages and tribes. These stories can be considered as the symbol of unity in diversity prevailed in India. Folktales that have been chosen for this collection and told in a variety of languages clearly allude to the social and cultural structures of Indian culture. Our understanding of culture and how it functions in human communities may be improved by studying folk culture and oral tradition. It helps in understanding human life and the need of the folktales in a culturally constituted world. Thus, the current paper entitled Representation of Indian Diversity: Reading A.K. Ramanujan's Folktales from India" discusses the multicultural aspects of Indian society.

Keywords: Folklore, storytelling, Folktales, Culture

Introduction

Writer A.K. Ramanujan who studied literature and was interested in many kinds of Folklore, found the story is a storehouse of knowledge. His works on Indian Cinderella and an Indian story of Oedipus attest amply to his extensive and profound involvement in Folklore Studies. Folklore is the language of the uneducated and permeates childhoods the folk wisdom through its own way. As India is a multicultural nation, country possess as many languages, culture, religious sects and other diversities. Such a context India had the richness in the storytelling tradition also. Our heritage is very unique in that aspect, as it gets the global reach and attention on the other hand. Indian Folktales always influenced the rich history of Folklore Studies. The popular culture is also got high impact by the fables and folktales which is depicted the life of common people, kings, animals, birds and each flora and fauna. A.K. Ramanujan's work Folktales from India can be studied by considering its vivid portrayal of characters.

Objectives

1. To study the rich characterization in the Folktales From India by A.K. Ramanujan.
2. To understand the contribution of A. K. Ramanujan in the field of folk literature.
3. To comprehend the significance of Indian folk wisdom.

Review of Literature

Folktales from India is a collection of tales comprises of 107 folktales. The book is a translation from twenty-one different Indian languages. The tales have all undoubtedly been told and retold multiple times, which is translated to different languages in different times and places. But Ramanujan points out that he has taken care to include only tales from actual tellers and not literary texts. Thus, readers have a vast variety of stories translated from twenty-two Indian languages from different regions of the nation, India. The book opens with

a detailed introduction, which discusses the unavoidable aspects of the oral traditions in the recognition of Indian culture and tradition.

Methodology

In the current study both the descriptive method and textual analysis are followed. Data is collected from the primary sources of selected stories from the book *Folktales From India* by A.K Ramanujan and secondary resources including books, articles and papers.

Discussion and Analysis

Attipat Krishnaswami Ramanujan (1959 -1993) was a versatile Scholar who contributed in poetry, drama, linguistics, translation and Folklore Studies. He graduated from the University of Mysore with B.A. and M.A. in English Literature in the year 1949 and 1950 respectively. Initially Ramanujan was a young Scholar and lecturer in various higher educated Institutions in South India. Gradually Ramanujan started gathering stories that captivated him began to collect tales that fascinated him. He met Edwin Kirkland of the University of Florida, the one who urged him to submit his translations of Kannada stories for American publications. A few years later, he enrolled at Indiana University to pursue Linguistics and Folklore Studies. After earning his PhD, in 1963 he joined at the University of Chicago as a faculty. He also spent thirty years as a faculty at the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilisation. As a poet and literary figure Ramanujan serves his life time for giving larger audience to Indian literature. Ramanujan was one of the key intellectual figures who tried to interpret and examine proverbs, lullabies, folktales and folksongs. As Ramanujan well versed in five languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and English, he was exposed into verities of literature in India and abroad. Eighteen books and vast number of essays and inspiring and influential public lectures are also included in his intellectual contributions. In 1976, he received the Padma Sri, the prestigious Cultural Award from the Government of India, and the Macarthur Fellowship in 1983. *Where Mirrors Are Windows: Towards an Anthology of Reflections* is one of his important essays in Folklore Studies. *The Interior Landscape: Love Poems from a Classical Tamil Anthology*, *Folktales From India: Oral Tales form Twenty Indian Languages* are the most important contribution of Ramanujan.

Folktales from India comprises of 107 folktales is a translation from twenty-one different languages. The most significant thing about folktales is the fluidity encompasses with the tales. In the Preface to *Folktales from India*, A.K Ramanujan says, “no selection can truly ‘represent’ the multiple and changing lives of Indian tales.” A. K Ramanujan defines a folktale as “a poetic text that carries some of its cultural contexts within it; it is also a travelling metaphor that finds a new meaning with each new telling.” Here he defines folktales are “the literature of the dialects, those mother tongues of villages, street, kitchen, tribal hut, and wayside tea shop.” In this collection of folktales is the similarities and repetitions in themes and motifs across tales translated from different languages. A. K Ramanujan says, “It is well known that such folklore items, like many other sorts of items in cultural exchange, are autotelic: that is, they travel by themselves without (often) any movement of populations. A proverb, a riddle, a joke, a story, a remedy, or a recipe travels every time it is told. It crosses linguistic boundaries any time a bilingual person tells it or hears it.” He explains that the folktales that change from teller to teller, structure of the tale remains the same while the social, cultural and other background details will change. This collection comprises 107 tales, quite brief, and contained. Many stories in this collection have intricate plots containing multiple twists and turns also. These tales, typically told to children, are entertaining, but their chief concern is didactic. Thus, most of them conclude justly, with the good being rewarded and the wicked being punished. The uniqueness and simplicity of these tales makes it more attractive to catch the attention of the readers. A man generally leaves home for finding of wealth or valuable things from the faraway place. He often faces huge obstacles for attaining his goal. In the denouement, he is triumphant and rewarded with wealth or a bride. This is one of the common structures of the tales.

Literary Analysis

The story entitled *The Barber and the Brahman Demon*, a severely unemployed barber spends the entire day grooming himself in front of the mirror. After receiving a reprimand from his mother one day, he makes the decision to leave home in an attempt to become wealthy. He meets a demon in the wilderness who wants to feast on the flesh of his victim. The story *The Barber and the Brahman Demon*, written in Bengali, follows this premise of quest, adventures and finally happy ending with a marriage.

On the other hand, an extremely impoverished Brahman becomes weary of his situation and decides to travel to the holy city of Kashi in the Tamil story, *A Musical Demon*. A young Brahman goes in quest of a famous guru the one who expects to share the knowledge to in *Outwitting Fate* (Tamil). The youngest of three boys, Tulugu, sets off from home in *Winning A Princess* to try to triumph a princess just turned down all suitors, including his older siblings. In the aforementioned tales, the path is treacherous and protracted, filled with dangers in the shape of ferocious creatures or otherworldly entities. Although the men succeed in their challenging tasks, and on the other hand women are often viewed as either prizes or hostages.

In the Kannada story entitled *The Clever Daughter-In-Law*, a despotic mother-in-law has her daughter-in-law perform all home chores and consume rotting rice. She gets beaten if she complains. The husband keeps his mouth shut and is modest. By the time the tale is through, the daughter-in-law has grown to be the head of the family and commands the other two.

In Kashmiri tale *The Wife Who Refused To Be Beaten*, a wealthy merchant challenges his naive and dim-witted son to a tough task. Fortunately, the boy meets the daughter of an ironsmith, who lends a hand. Meddling people who oppose the marriage tell the son to abuse his spouse when the vendor chooses to marry the two. Ultimately, she saves him once more this time from the allure of a skilled gambler proving that "she is too good for him." It's interesting to note that marriage ends in stories focusing on males, but it starts in stories centred on women. In this instance, protecting or rescuing males is the responsibility of female characters. They accomplish this by outwitting adversaries, by deciphering puzzles, proving their greater knowledge and tenacity. The guys in these stories are frequently helpless or foolish, subject to the whims of other people, such as their moms.

Relationships other than marriage are also discussed. These stories are about dads and daughters, about brothers and sisters, and frequently about opposing families. For example, in one of my favourite Bengali stories from childhood, *Sukhu and Dukhu*, a father had two wives and two daughters, *Dukhu* and *Sukhu*. Till his death, he would always adore the younger couple more. Naturally, the older daughter *Dukhu*, the name denotes sadness, is the righteous one, and they will both receive their just desserts. The younger daughter *Sukhu*, called after joy, is the wicked one. These family-focused stories, which examine "not only bonds of affection but rivalry, incest, betrayal, and cruelty," provide psychological insights, according to Ramanujan. For example, the prince in *Sona and Rupa* (Hindi/Malwi) wants his sisters. However, a feminist interpretation retains equal significance, particularly in stories featuring households headed by a male (often the king) who has multiple co-wives. One of the many enjoyable aspects of folktales is magic. You will discover in these pages that women can change into blossoming trees and that magical bowls can produce an infinite supply of delectable food. These stories, which include supernatural creatures like *brahma rakshasas* or demons or woodland spirits, have a poetic quality due to magical occurrences.

As Ramanujan notes, the gods in folktales have bodies and carry out bodily functions, in contrast to mythology. Many of the spirits that appear in these stories have a tendency to be credulous, easily tricked, or rattled. Numerous stories address the idea of fate. While fate can be defied in certain situations, it is unavoidable in others. If the fourth category is where magic appears to help enable the impossible happen, then rationalist court jesters are usually the ones who bring rulers, especially powerful monarchs, back to earth in these cases. Depending on the area you grew up in, the stories of guys like "Birbal", "Tenali Rama", and "Gopal Bhar" have long been cherished for their humour. These astute, funny men regularly expose the foolishness of their rulers' policies.

Animal folktales are among the oldest and most well-known in India; they date back to the *Panchatantra* and the *Jatakas*, two of the oldest known written writings. Designed with children in mind, they provide their young audience a sense of empowerment via the defeat of larger animals like as tigers by their diminutive equivalents, the crow and Hiranman the parrot. One well-known story in this genre is *The Monkey and the Crocodile* (Kannada, Tamil.)

This includes metafiction, or fiction about fiction, in which the narrators consider stories or the stories themselves are stories. It may not be by coincidence that the book opens with two of these stories. A woman becomes heavier and fatter in Tamil story *Tell It To The Walls* because she is unable to confide in anybody about her problems. Eventually, she starts complaining to walls one day. The walls crumble with the burden of the stories as she continues, but she gets lighter and lighter. The story *Untold Stories* (Gondi), in which a farmer declines to narrate the four stories that is aware of, comes right after this one. The stories escape his stomach when he sleeps, expressing their rage at not being allowed to. These and other stories highlight how important it is to let oral histories spread. They must be passed on in order for them to survive, and as they go around and occasionally develop independent lives, they do so.

An elderly woman can't find anyone to listen to her story about the sun god in a subsequent story, *A Story In Search of An Audience*. Ultimately, the unborn child within a pregnant woman's womb is the only listener she has access to. The elderly woman recounts the infant her story while the mother is sleeping, concluding with a benediction: "Wherever you go, deserted villages will become prosperous towns, cotton seeds will become pearls, dry trees will be covered with fruit, even old cows will give milk, barren women will have children, lost jewels will be found, and dead men will come back to life."

Findings and Conclusion

Folktales are inevitable and relevant in the contemporary digital context of India. Folktales are more effective and closer to the common folk in transferring cultural and moral values in a digitized world by instil the Indian mythology and folklore. The folktales are the medium in which one generation transfer wisdom for the coming generation or future generation. Digital storytelling helps in this purpose. The folktales are very much contemporary in the digitized world and it accommodates advancements in technology as a way of ensuring its existence. There was a decline in the storytelling in India when it turns to promote nuclear families in the

societies. Digital mediums pave way to regain its power from that decline through inventing new tools and software to instil the values system. This anthology is amusing and indispensable for those with an interest in Indian folklore, as well as for young people who are beginning to study folk literature and need bedtime stories to pass the time.

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