

**TRANSCULTURALISM IN CHILDREN’S LITERATURE:  
ALLUDES TO A.K RAMANUJAN’S FOLKTALES FROM INDIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

The poet, translator, linguist and folklorist A.K Ramanujan was born in Mysore and received his masters in English Language & Literature from the University of Mysore. His collection of Folktales from India is one of the best examples of his work in Indian folklore studies. It has the rich diversity of languages in India with lots of regional differences. This collection reflects Ramanujan’s respect for folktales and for Indian tradition of storytelling. Folklore pervades childhood, families, and

communities and is the language of the illiterate. It consists of legends, music, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs which helps human community to grow. India is a multicultural land with many myths and legends. The intention of this research paper is to analyze how transculturalism is said in Children’s Literature through the translated folktales of A.K Ramanujan.

A.K Ramanujan has brought alive the magic of storytelling. And his retelling of these folktales from various regions of India brings the enlightenment in every individual.

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In recent times, we have seen, at first hesitant but increasingly insistent, the appearance of the word “transcultural”, which attempts to recognize intercultural dynamics as inherent in any cultural interaction or exchange. The Anglo-Saxon world has, in particular, thrown its weight behind this concept in recognition of the failure of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism has constituted an attempt to give order to an incipient mix of people from different cultures and with different values. Under the slogan “the right to be different”, one has spotlighted the different, fought against racism, raised political awareness and reformed educational programmes. Yet the very people who invented the concept of multiculturalism now denounce it: they speak about the language of diversity through ethnocentric codes and rules; they talk about tolerance towards other cultures

in private and about conforming to a single, united culture in public.

The view that there are distinct cultures which ‘interact’ with each other is implicit in the very notion of transculturalism. This agenda is most clearly manifested in the ‘culture-care theory’ advocated by Leininger although transculturalism should not be seen as a homo-genous body of work. Learning about ethnic groups in the conventional transculturalist project means learning about cultural groups so that ‘culturally sensitive’ care can be provided. Transculturalism rests on liberal assumptions that stress the individual and individual rights, freedoms, responsibilities and action. There are many critics of this approach, who highlight a failure to theorize power relations; a lack of awareness of the social context and discourses that shape social identities and representations, privileging of

individualism, and the naive optimism and rationalism inherent in the society.

“No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems to be no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about.”

Edward Said, ‘Culture and Imperialism’

The first scholar to acknowledge the importance of processes of “transculturation” was the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his book ‘Cuban Counterpoint’ to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures. The main intention of this paper is to analysis how the concept of ‘transculturalism’ is being used in A.K Ramanujan’s works with special reference to his Folktales From India.

Anyone studying the culture of India needs to study not only its written classics but its oral traditions as well, of which folktales is

an important part. . Folk-tales have been an integral part of the Indian culture since time immemorial. Folk tales create balance in the society. They help us in understanding life and also help us in dealing with life. Our country with diverse religions, languages and cultures, presents a very wide horizon of folk-tales. The range is remarkable. Many folk tales have been created to maintain harmony in the family. There are romantic tales spread all over India. Myth, legend and popular tales are the three major components of this genre. Fairy tales on the other hand have a tinge of magic in them. A fable is a tale which involves animals. Apart from the above categories, there are humorous folk tales. Wit and humor are part of these tales. These stories told by the early people are handed down from generation to generation and are sometimes carried by migrating tribes and businessmen.

Every region of India has stories of one rich sister, one poor sister, or one rich sister-in-law and one not so rich brother-in-law etc. Through a small narrative, the message of mutual cooperation within the family is beautifully conveyed. India has been an agrarian society. The rural people formed these folk tales in order to give expression to

their innermost desires. The folk-tales also maintain the fabric of the society. For example, if the girls of a village do not have a say in choosing a life partner, they have over the centuries created stories wherein the girl demands a handsome, fair and working boy. Folk-tales in India have worked as a surviving tool, especially for women. They evolve over the centuries. They are enriched by the soil and life.. Generation after generation, people narrate these tales, relish them, interchange them and enrich them. Folk tales are very interesting with lots of simplicity, humor, magic and wit in them. They make the experience of life entertaining. Usually folk tales are happy ending. Things are amicably resolved. Folk tales represent all classes of the society.

A.K Ramanujan's Folktales from India serves as an agent in the process of socializing the youngsters in a standard way. When a person reads about other people in a different society and in context, he/she gets the opportunity to explore a part of that culture. India is considered to be multicultural with a few victories in challenging the cultural mechanisms. For the youngsters of the new century in India there

is a need to recognize the diversity of cultures and languages that exist all around them. In a sense, it is a historically and socially placed practice, both in itself socially shaped and in turn, socially shaping in nature. Language is constitutive of three elements: social identities, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. Indeed, many scholars today feel that folk literature, the collected and transcribed oral tales of people, may be one of the ingredients necessary for youngsters to find reading books a delightful experience. Based on readers' emotional and intellectual development, their experience of folk literature made them find new worlds grounded in fantasy but still reflecting realistic human conditions. They also found that interests in other cultures are developed through the use of folk literature. It is therefore necessary to understand what kind of folk literature is available in India. In India, there are three sets of tales, the Panchatantra, the Hitopadesa, and the Jataka written in classical Sanskrit that are even today continuing to attract the attention of storytellers.

In considering how children's books can reflect the culture of a society, A.K

Ramanujan has translated a collection of more than one hundred stories from 22 regional languages of India. These stories represent favorite narratives from subcontinent. Ramanujan's outstanding retelling is not merely frivolous "entertainment," they are part of a society's general culture. The kind of children's books that are out there does not necessarily reflect the totality of choices of Indian society but, rather, it indicates a cultural environment that is both constructed by ideologies, and in turn, construct identities. The process ends up in perpetuating or grooming a particular image of races, ethnicities, or facts about different region of India. There seems to be cultural shifts in the regional literature of India. This shifts gives the concept of Transculturalism. The study that this effort generates from the desire to have an analysis of cultures adequate to respond to a "new" global cultural economy in the country. The intent is to provide a location where the new politics of difference -- racial, sexual, cultural, transnational -- can combine and be articulated in all their dazzling plurality the word "India," comes to mind the visualization of the spiritual, the fatalistic, the collective, the head-dresses, the turbans, the fabrics, and the elephants. Ramanujan

finds that these ideas are incomplete and fragmented because of the lack of the original context in which these concepts were taken. They produce meaningful knowledge about that subject. This knowledge influences social practices, and so have real consequences and effects.

Instead of arranging the tales according to some classificatory scheme, A.K Ramanujan has arranged them in eleven cycle or sessions, each consisting of eight to eleven tales. Each cycle has the male-centered tale in which the hero is featured prominently and moves out of the family in search of adventures. The women-centered tale -- saving, rescuing, or reviving a man, often solving riddles on behalf, becomes the life task of the heroine. The tales about families, tales about death, gods and demons, tales about animals and stories about stories.

In the view being developed here, even what is called the Great tradition is not singular but plural, it is a set of interactive pan Indian system like Brahminism, Buddhism and Jainism. To be comprehensive, we should add Islam, Zoroastrianism, Christianity and modernity itself as the other active systems that participate in this give and take. Folklore participate in all these system. The

Great Traditions are pan Indian and Little Traditions are not. Sanskrit and Prakrit, though they have pan- India distribution, still originate in particular regions: Sanskrit itself, through translocal and apparently ageographic, has varieties of pronunciation that can be identified as Bengali, Malayali or Banarasi. Nor are the so called Little Traditions necessarily or usually confined to small localities or dialect. Proverbs, riddles and short stories and tunes, motifs and genres of songs and dances are not confined to a region, even though they may be embodied in the non literate dialects and may seem to be enclosed in those mythic entities called self- sufficient village communities. 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 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. The language and regions in India have, therefore, a large stock of shared folk materials. Yet these shared items may carry different meanings in different regions and uses. For instance the proverb 'It's dark under the lamp' has

been collected in Kannada and in Kashmiri, at two ends the Indian subcontinent. The meaning varies as the language varies. This kind of variation in the meaning is characteristics of cultural forms.

Scholars insist on identifying folk tales from different cultures as a way of helping young readers to understand the personal dimension and the standards of behavior of a culture, and at the same time reduce stereotypes about that culture, it is difficult to see how this can be achieved by describing a culture only through the genre of folktales, as is the case with depictions of different regions in India. Thomas King articulates writers' responsibilities when he writes that "The job of writers is to hold up prisms (mirrors are overrated) so we can admire ourselves from different angles, colors, and perspectives" thus suggesting that even if a particular genre like folk tale is used to depict another culture, its handling by the writer and the illustrator needs to offer a variety of perspectives just as colors glancing off inside a prism. The book analyzed are drawing on folk tales from India and have, literally, created the images that go along with the narratives, and incorporate a timeless character to the tales

that is not as positive in nature as they would like us to believe. Timelessness, in these stories, appears synonymous with a lack of development and with poverty and exotic elements. The titles, the sketches/images, and the stories of the tales is quite dated and events are unfolding a long, long time ago even if they were mostly written some decades ago. There are very limited sketches of how people in India live today. The play of language has the transcendental power to "make present" a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally and socially absent from the "here and now." Despite this powerful aspect of language, the discourses that we came across about India in this selection of folktales are always seem to be of "other" men in "another" time. These stories are being informed only by India's past and not its present and has no indication of what to expect in the future. What was true about Said's writings in 1978 about "Orientalism"

and all things Asian, has not really changed in the close to three decades that have gone by since. The nature of the West in trying to decide and then define what the developing world's authentic nature in its essence is and is not has become evident through this study once again.

The desire to "freeze" the "native culture" is but a familiar hierarchical strategy for "othering" India generally considered to be a member of developing nations. There is a land in the East, called India. It is a magical and mysterious place, and the customs of the people who live there, may seem strange to an outsider. Presumably, it is about adult literary interests here, because as through this study in regional literature and in transculturalism the popular expectations about various regions of India seem to be dictated by stereotypes, the discomfort in approaching multiculturalism, and the concept of the "other" who is socially, temporally, and spatially removed.

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