

A.K. Ramanujan: Towards Indian Tradition and folklores

Deepak Kumar Baliarsingh¹ and Dr. Naveen Kumar Mehta²

¹Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Barla, Raisen, Madhya Pradesh.

²Associate Professor, Dean, and H.o.D, Dept. of English, Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Barla, Raisen, Madhya Pradesh.

Abstract

The knowledge and mastery of arranging words to breathe life to the verses are vividly seen in the poetry of A.K Ramanujan. The appropriateness in describing things in poetry and various translations work in all three languages Tamil, Kannada, and English is distinctly appreciated by most of the prominent poets and authors. The two volumes of poems named Folktales from India: A selection of oral tales from twenty-two languages (1991) and A flowering tree and other oral tales from India (1997). Ramanujan's poetry unveils the most dignified characteristics of both Indian and modernist poetry. The Indian poetry owes most of the basic substantial social life from the poetry of A.K. Ramanujan. The society is often respondent to the folk tales, the poet has the opinion that proverbs and idioms work meaningfully with contexts. They represent cultures and traditions of India. A.K. Ramanujan has given emotional and psychological analysis of all the folklores. The folktales never get faded through the time even it gets a new shape in every recreation. He has made a significant statement in Preface to folktales from India that every tale has a definite telling till someone reads it or tells it to others but when it is retold and goes further ahead it comes with number of variations and changes in the tale. The folklorists rework on the folklores to give life into it and claim that they are the latest teller and asks the reader to think of themselves the latest reader. The poems from the beginning to the end try to cover Indian sensibilities while delineating minute details of Indian life, emotions, ethics and many more elements prevailing in the life of Indians. The poet could be able to compare and contrast many of his opinions while residing overseas to briefly adhering the lifestyle and modern approach of western culture with the conventional Indian mindsets.

Keywords: Culture, Folklores, Folktales, Modernity, Tradition

Introduction

A.K. Ramanujan has written series of papers that widely talk about Indian folklores using Tamil and Kannada examples in his notes. He has always attempted to unfold the themes that have been never discovered before as well he tries to correlate them with other narratives to publicize them from a different perspective. The theme that is covered in this paper is exclusively not only dealing with the folklore in ordinary context rather within the context of Indian studies¹. Ramanujan started compiling Kannada folklores in his early twenties although he had least idea of what he was doing until Edwin Kirkland, professor of University of Florida, had interaction with him. Prof. Kirkland was then working on South Asian Folklore in 1956, and the text got its publication in 1966. It was Kirkland's influence which made some of Ramanujan's work published in Southern Folklore quarterly, which then got published in University of Florida. Kirkland had been possibly the man behind the identification of India's one of the best folklorists, he could see the potentiality and clarity in the description of Ramanujan's work. The service period of Ramanujan in Belgaum was quite happening as he collected a good number of stories from *Kittur*, *Bailhongal* and some of the remotest villages around Belgaum. Ramanujan had been one of the pioneer scholars in India who have appropriately looked at folklore as a major field to be discovered. It is not less than any other standard of poetic form. The most important aspect of his analysis and combination of exceptional personal passion. As a student and a keen observer, he tried the multifold specimen of folklores in India. He could accurately demonstrate what others have stated as the Asian studies are inseparable from the study of Indian folklore. There are many versions of several systems, people use them depending on audience and contexts². The individuals are responsible rather than the civilization for the overlapping of the expressive codes.

European had the first printing press to have Bible printed first, a very needful invention of Gutenberg, it is just a century after Vasco da Gama has landed on the coast of India. The Christian missionaries have learned the Indian culture, language and even printed many of the essential manuscripts of ancient knowledge in India. The Sanskrit language has recently represented India to the western and even the Americans have included regional languages to many of their curriculums in different Universities³. There are some of the prominent languages which include Tamil, Hindi, and Bengali that appeared in the lists of the International Universities. The linguists and anthropologists had taken due care to understand the semantic

and syntactic pattern of the language as well the socio-cultural richness of the original speakers of those highly enriched languages, however those languages are only a minor miniature form of the spoken language in the rural areas. The census report provides the data of 3000 languages communicated across the nation as mother tongue in 1971, for better comprehension linguists have dropped them to only 105 languages which are the root to 3000 dialects. Surprisingly 90 languages out of 105 are spoken by less than 5% of the population, 65 languages are spoken by small tribes including Sanskrit. A.K. Ramanujan is incomparable while comparing, classifying and analyzing his masterpieces. He is well known to have dealt wisely his dual responsibilities. Being a folklorist and anthropologist, he had a bend of mind for subjects like psychology and linguistics, the knowledge of various subjects enhanced his approaches to folklores to a good extent. The poetry of Ramanujan reflects cultural patterns of both east and west, the descriptions are quite insightful. In the middle of the present conflict in the present world Ramanujan's poetry happens to be the source of wisdom and relevance. The delineation of human atrocities is accurately presented through a vision of a combination of east and west. The problematic life of human being and situations are covered by the perspective of Indian experience.

The appropriate images are depicting the socio-psychological contradictions and complexities felt by the people in any context of life. The traditions of India and the western world are well developed in the works of Ramanujan. The author has always been careful about the unexplored sentiments of human life, which is overlooked in today's life. He states the poetry aims to unfold the innermost sentiments of the people and the cultural tradition of India is distinctly plural in nature, though it conflicts, however it is at least based on two major principles i.e. context-sensitivity and reflection of various types. These are consistently dropping the old customs and generating a newer one. The traditions in Buddhism, Jainism, Brahminism, traditions of folklore and the sense of modernity are all prominent responses of the systems that respond to the existing surrounding traditions, the system inclines to convert or invert their neighbourhood with the force of practicing cultures, furthermore there are dialogic divisions which is consistently progressing in India. The sense of reflexivity has its many forms; family, awareness of self, parody, antistructure, utopia, dystopia and so on the ironies are being connected with that multi variety of responses in the textual Indian literary paper and its relations to oral and written literature over the past centuries⁴.

The hundreds of languages consisting of many numbers of dialects offers an open platform to deal with such relations and proposals while producing texts containing significantly familiar meanings with its unique and individual meaning which could be decoded by only the local readers and commentators. The participants of the language confirm the availability of the text is not historical but in an orderly approach that alters simultaneous order of the text slightly. In the version of T.S. Eliot European literature has descended in a simultaneous order but it appeals strongly while mentioning the order of Indian literary tradition in order till the arrival of early nineteenth century. The modern approach to traditions disrupted the whole process of reflexivity with the aspects of originality and autonomy in the work. The printing press has been playing a very crucial role while coordinating between author to book and book to reader, it is bifurcating the present from the past while putting emphasis on the pastness in past more than the essence of presence in the present. The scientific bend of mind made Ramanujan inclined towards folktales which made it possible for him to use the term counter system to the literature which is not judged classical at all. In his version classical literature is indispensable and Indian tradition is incomplete without it. The Bhakti folktales have a counter system, the theory of *Karma* has limited task to do while the care is taken for the women chastity and classical drama plays active roles⁵. The tales that contain women as protagonists present serious focus in later part of his life. The tales written in relation to women are context-sensitive if it is observed from the perspective of women and that's in Hindu India. Ramanujan again touched the boundaries stating in a mother tongue that in Indian context which separates women and men being in the same world. The folklores overlap as the other expressive systems do exists in Indian society; the counter systems are neither autonomous nor independent to their respondents. Ramanujan marks alternatives and consistency between traditions and folklores. He has suggested the folklores to have two significant usages as it could be riddles for domestic purposes and proverbs for public. The anonymous characters get named in the publicly performed mythological epics. Ramanujan had made another contribution to the traditional folklores by re-establishing relation between folklores told in India with folklores from India told around the world. The context-sensitive and pluralistic ideas brought a new insight to the study of Indian folktales. There is even noticeable up-gradation in his first attempt at analysing folktales with the later one. The folktales written in 1970's to 1980s have received brilliant explanations. The 1982 essays have presented his profound knowledge of Proppian folktale and psychology concerned with it. The author's

emphasis was not to see whether an Indian tale fits any categories of European tales rather if any characters of Indian context have prominence characteristics to Kannada cultures. This happens to be some of the major contributions of Ramanujan to the international folklores.

There is certainly huge number of folklorists working across the country and still the number is coming up. Ramanujan had been the pioneering folklorist to bring the folklores to a new stage. The oral tales were confined to the kitchen place and women were probably the speaker of the tales that too to entertain the kids while feeding the children in evening. The stories possibly aimed to ease the process of feeding a child or making someone sleep peacefully, there happen to be other female members in house who are participating and listening them as if they are going to be the next generation storyteller when achieving the prospectus of motherhood. Its more surprisingly the tale resonates with the world of women. The stories even depicts and unduly contains the aspirations, values, sufferings, and fantasies of women, perhaps it's because the story often gets a female speaker. The stories revolve around the life of a girl and the development of the story depends on what stage of life the girl gets married in the story. There are some tales where life of a certain character would undergo different stages of life and marriage will occur in the middle of the story. The protagonist of the narrative would have faced conservative and orthodox monopoly of both brothers and parents before marriage and the same atrocities from the in-law's house. Some of the tales would begin with the girl's marriage and soon after the marriage the husband dies and she is held responsible for the misfortune caused to the family. The tales around the globe, we find it starts with the right condition but as the story develops the characters face different shortcomings. The story of Cinderella would be the right example which is originally from the Indian folktale named *Suvarna devata* and *Hanchi* in Kannad. The distinctive feature of the tales is to bring the wisdom, potentiality, and foresight of women in saving themselves and her family to the limelight. The women characters would be the cause of other women's suffering by manipulating some of the men in the narrative, its again the women who find a way to get rid of the problems.

The world has been expressing intolerance towards the women and her movements, unlikely the modern women we had Sita, Savitri, Parvati who had been very much devoted towards their husband. The present tales depict the dark side of the women, the sophisticated and technologically advanced fast life don't even know the neighbours. The loneliness has

made us clumsy and we feel helpless as we don't have people to share our happiness and disappoints. That has resulted us to have different diseases, right from diabetes to blood pressure. To some extent our children's moral education is deprived and undermined by the folktales through the narration of folktales in the present education system allows our kids to sense the locale and nativity. Storytelling is exclusively an art and can't be mastered by just telling them accurately rather sometimes by giving love to the kids. The tone and preaching the story must be in a cheerful voice as the storyteller makes the kids to dream of a new world they feel and make worlds of their own and many times imagine themselves to be the protagonist or the superhero in the tale. The stories like the flowering tree bear all concern of women and nature as well representing their suffering. The need for folk stories is obvious and indispensable. The narratives sharpen our imagination, it makes us sensible, cures us and guides us through many mystifying situations in our life. The stories like the serpent lover and the flowering tree have gained immense popularity as well as have been adopted to many television serials or movies. The child in every man never dies and it always wishes to feel to be the hero in that fantasy world. The study of folktales would certainly enhance our understanding of our rich culture, human society, and psychology⁶. The important concept about the folk tales is it precisely depicts everything. The present life can be correlated with the study of folktales in length, it can be understood in a part or whole. The folktales have not been confined to its periodical improvement as verbal arts or songs rather it talks about folk architecture, agriculture, lifestyle, costume, religion, medicine, recreation, literature, and the number counts on. It is in total the beautiful combination of cultural, spiritual and material aspects that serves the real essence of folklore. The study of folklore and anthropology both are intertwined and dealing with the nature of the being, mind, and soul to its true meaning.

Conclusion

The above study is an attempt to appreciate the contribution of A.K. Ramanujan in the domain of folktales in India and in specialization to the Kannad folktales. The representation of India and its culture to the world through the narratives and folklore from different parts of India has been highly proclaimed with high respect. The virtues which have been sustaining for centuries in the blood of Indians owes many of its source from the folktales. The stories have therapeutic effect as it heals much of our pain and distress. The concept and the ways that he used to analyse the characters of the folktales made him distinctively unique among the

contemporary folklorists around the globe. This small paper may not cover the complete work of Ramanujan, however some of his remarkable works and concepts have been discussed, he has attempted with great care to popularize the folktales. The work of Ramanujan has been like a lamp that dispels darkness from the folklore literature in India. The tales told by Ramanujan has illuminated all possible corner of contemporary literature and provided a path of research for the researchers to explore more details from Indian folktales.

References

¹ Sahab Lal, Srivastava. *Folk Culture and Oral Tradition (A Comparative Study of Regions in Rajasthan and Eastern U.P.)* New Delhi: Abhinav Publications, 1974. P-16

² Pattanaik, D.P., *The Relevance of South Asian Folklore. In Indian Folklore II*, Mysore: Central Institute of Indian Language, 1987. P-12

³ Ramanujan, A.K., *Folktales from India*. Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 1994, P-35.

⁴ Ramanujan, A.K., *A Flowering Tree and Other Oral Tales from India*. Berkely: University of California Press, P-9

⁵ Ramanujan, A.K., *Journeys A Poet's Diary*, Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, 2019, P-13

⁶ Murthy, Anita, *Great Folktales from the World*, Delhi, 2019, P-128