

TRANSLATING INDIAN AND ENGLISH NARRATIVES THROUGH FOLKLORE
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Abstract:

The cultural heritage, values, and worldview of various communities are vividly reflected in Indian folklore, which includes myths, legends, folktales, songs, and a wide range of oral traditions passed down through generations. Because of India's immense linguistic diversity, deep cultural specificity, regional variations, and distinctive oral narrative styles, translating Indian folklore into English presents not only significant challenges but also meaningful opportunities for these stories to reach a global audience. The process of translation must therefore navigate issues of cultural nuance, symbolic meaning, and performative elements of storytelling. At the same time, it offers a pathway for wider recognition and appreciation of India's rich narrative traditions. This essay explores how translation contributes to the preservation and revitalization of Indian folklore, evaluates the methods and strategies translators use to convey both meaning and cultural context, and emphasizes how thoughtful translation can profoundly influence cultural comprehension, cross-cultural engagement, and long-term heritage conservation.

Keywords: oral tradition, translation, English, Indian folklore, cultural preservation, and intercultural dialogue.

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Introduction:

India is home to a rich and diverse folklore tradition, spanning hundreds of languages and regions. Stories such as the Panchatantra, Jataka tales, and regional narratives from Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, and Marathi cultures carry deep moral, social, and cultural significance. Myths and legends that impart moral lessons abound in Indian folklore. The Panchatantra and Jataka tales of cunning animals impart wisdom, friendship, and justice lessons. Folk legends frequently emphasize the triumph of good over evil, the value of integrity, and the fortitude to overcome adversity. Both adults and children can learn from these tales. Translating these narratives into English is essential for global accessibility and academic research but is complicated by cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and oral storytelling features.

Indian folklore encompasses a wide range of narrative traditions, including fables such as the Panchatantra, moral tales like the Jataka stories, regional folktales

such as those of Tenali Raman and Thakurmar Jhuli, as well as the rich oral narratives of various tribal communities. Scholars like Alan Dundes and A. K. Ramanujan highlight how these stories illustrate the deep interconnection between folklore, culture, and morality. A defining characteristic of Indian folklore is its remarkable diversity, which reflects the linguistic, regional, and cultural plurality of the country.

India's multilingual and multicultural environment is vividly reflected in its regional legends, tribal stories, Panchatantra fables, Jataka narratives, and countless village myths that circulate across generations. Because these stories are shaped by diverse social structures, vibrant oral traditions, and deeply rooted regional customs, they often exist in multiple forms and retellings (Ramanujan, 1991). This inherent fluidity poses a significant challenge for translators, who must decide which version—or combination of versions should be represented in English. Such choices

inevitably influence how global readers understand the cultural context and moral significance of these tales. Folklore, as a vital component of India's cultural landscape, has been preserved and transmitted for centuries through fables, myths, legends, songs, rituals, and oral histories that bind communities together. When these narratives are translated from Indian languages into English, they undergo a complex process of literary, linguistic, and cultural transformation. Translation becomes far more than a mere linguistic exercise; it evolves into an act of cultural negotiation in which the translator must balance traditional values, indigenous narrative techniques, symbolic imagery, and the worldview embedded in each tale.

Moreover, translation highlights the dynamic nature of storytelling, revealing how meanings shift when stories move across languages and cultural boundaries. In this way, translated folklore becomes a powerful medium for cross-cultural engagement, offering readers worldwide a glimpse into India's diverse traditions while encouraging deeper appreciation and dialogue across cultures.

There are various difficulties when translating Indian folklore into English:

Cultural Background:

English readers may not be familiar with the caste, rituals, festivals, kinship structures, and mythological systems mentioned in Indian folklore. Explanatory notes or careful adaptation are necessary to capture these elements (Blackburn, 2001).

Linguistic Variability:

Idioms, proverbs, and repetitions that are closely linked to regional speech patterns are frequently used in Indian languages. There aren't always natural English equivalents for these. While a free translation runs the risk of losing authenticity, a literal translation could sound flat.

Oral Presentation:

A lot of Indian folktales use interactive storytelling, rhythm, and music. This oral energy must be replicated in English translations, which are more written in nature, through tone, narrative pacing, and imagery (Ramanujan, 1991).

Disparities in Worldviews:

The supernatural and the commonplace, or the divine and the human, are regularly combined in Indian folklore. These could be interpreted differently by English readers who are influenced by Western literary conventions. Translators have to strike a balance between readability and accuracy.

Many Indian folktales were translated for Western audiences by British academics during the colonial era. In order to conform to Victorian ideals, these translations frequently exoticized, moralized, or simplified Indian tales (Said, 1978). For instance, early English translations of the Panchatantra placed more emphasis on moral teachings than the original's philosophical and political undertones.

On the other hand, postcolonial translators like A.K. Ramanujan aimed to accurately and culturally sensitively depict Indian folklore. Instead of sifting Indian oral tradition through Western standards, their work highlights its richness.

Translation is crucial to bringing Indian folklore to a global audience, despite its challenges. English translations have made it possible for people all over the world to read Indian stories in classrooms and during literary discussions. They also help to preserve oral traditions by putting them in writing.

Translation also fosters cross-cultural understanding. Universal themes like good versus evil, cunning characters, moral dilemmas, and supernatural encounters allow English readers to relate to Indian folklore while also comprehending cultural differences.

Conclusion:

An effective way to transmit culture is through the translation of Indian folklore into English. It necessitates knowledge of oral tradition, history, and culture in addition to language.

The original stories are unavoidably altered by translation, but it also guarantees their continued existence and international recognition. Indian folklore keeps developing through careful translation, inspiring new readers and enhancing global literature.

Indian folklore translation into English is a linguistic and cultural undertaking.

Sensitivity to the moral, social, and cultural context of the original is necessary for an effective translation.

Translation is essential for conserving India's cultural legacy and advancing international understanding, even though some oral characteristics may change.

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