

A Comparative Study of Cultural and Transcultural Elements in the Works of AK Ramanujan and Derek Walcott

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Abstract—Cultural studies being a post colonial inspired, counter hegemonic project emerges as a network of reciprocal absorptions, transmissions and interactions but at the same time of domination. While attempting to look over the arena of culture a writer intends to follow the boundaries of nation states by studying not only differences, but at the same time stresses upon the old or new inter weavings blurring of former lines of tradition or unilateral positioning. Just like a man studying culture emphasizes not much upon the empirical commonalities in his behavior but rather upon the mechanism by whose agency the breath and indeterminateness of his inherent capacity is reduced to the narrowness and specificity of his actual accomplishment. The concept of mere diversity of custom across time and over space is just not a matter of grab and appearance but rather to entertain the idea that the humanity in its essence is equally as various as it is in its expression. For if one discards the notion that man with a capital 'M' is to be looked for either one should find out behind, under or beyond the realm of his customs and notions that replaces man but rather he needs to be looked 'in' them. Either he perishes without residue, into his time and place, a child and a perfect captive of his age. For every writer has his own ways of describing a common disposition of energy and direction. Though the cultural trait are established within the realm of the fixed tablet of tradition but at the same time by the social articulation of differences, as in the case of going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural heredity emerging in the moments of historical transformation. Hence rather than focusing upon the national identities and differences, it could be more productive for a writer to look to look towards the development of transcultural epistemic spaces thereby focusing upon the indeterminacy of language, knowledge system and its people.

INTRODUCTION

The paper concerned aims at giving an insight into the works of two very different poets belonging from the two very different regions. Though there country, their culture, life style, values and ethics might be very different from each other but it was there cultural concerns there concern for the people and their traditional beliefs which brought the two on the same platform. While on one hand we find Derek Walcott is concerned for his people who have successfully attained physical freedom from the cult of slavery, demolition, suppression, discrimination but are still living under the threat

of 'white man's burden' which is an inseparable mark. For the colonizer not only enslaved them socially but psychologically and metamorphically too. Walcott with the help of his poems takes the initiative to express these unheard voices. Similarly AK Ramanujan being a bilingual product of the east through his poems attempts to give life to the dying cultural beliefs and practices of the traditional Indian society thereby emphasizing more upon the familial ties. He sometimes delves into the past and sometimes reflects upon the present.

Colonial space is considered as an agonistic space. For it is believed that despite a flagrantly ambivalent presentation which thereby leaves the text to vulnerable and innocent misconstruction making visible those movements. For it was a belief of the colonized that the colonizers were strong and powerful practicing the fracturing of colonist text through the process of rearticulating it in the broken England for it made the natives believed that an:

Exercise of dependent colonial relations through snarcissistic identification. Since it occurred to them that when the words of the master became the site of hybridity the war like sign of the native – then we may not only read between the lines, but even seek to change the often the coercive reality that they so lucidly contain (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, 1995).

Contemporary thinking has firmly fixed the subjectivity in language for its quite difficult for one to account for the capacity of the subject in the contextual post colonial society which appears to construct the subjectivity for itself. For the purpose of the real against post colonial studies being to address that which lies between the conflicting participants in the imperial process and thereby there residual legacies. Debating the concept of the traditional and sacred belief of the colonized, indigenous and marginalized has expanded the horizon of post colonialism by bringing into consideration the complex, hybrid and rapidly changing cultural formations of both the marginalized and the first world people. The

materialistic conditions their practices and effects like transportation, slavery, displacement, emigration a racial and cultural discrimination have been dealt by creative writers as diverse in time and place be it Rabindranath Tagore, Raja Rao, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Derek Walcott, Judith Wright, AK Ramanujan, Tom King, Dennis Lee and many more who initiated to contribute on the development of critical discourse in the post colonial world. For a literary text is basically considered as a site of cultural control with a highly effective instrumentality for deforming the nature thereby situating him/her under the sigh of order.

Another unique formula which is employed in the field of post-colonial studies is the ethnic, racial, cultural differences and the power relations subsidizing within them which makes the understanding of the dimension of the neo-colonial dominance as much more subtle and expanded. Though one may argue that race is a flawed and self defeating category that traps the users within its biological and essentialist mesh but in practical terms race remains an ubiquitous social category that needs to be addressed as a reality be it in contemporary, personal and social relations even when ethnicity might offer a more nuanced understanding of the cultural identity.

Derek Walcott being amongst those who,

have the audacity to blame mathematician or there is a general belief that poetry should be immediately comprehensible even to the meanest intelligence. The truth is that much poetry of the highest quality demand its readers a degree of mental alertness and of general culture which most people do not possess.

Walcott thereby being guided by a commitment towards the development of the West Indies through his works helps us in understanding the contemporary Caribbean dilemma thereby offering ethnographic documents of the challenges and tension dealt by the post colonial society, documenting the same but also providing model of caribbeanness which not only values the fertilizing waters of cultural and racial ethnicity but also the socio political discourse. For him a Caribbean writer is someone who breathes in two different traditions as he goes on to say,

I am a kind of split writer; I have one tradition inside me going in one way and another going another. The mimetic, the narrative, and dance elements is strong on one side and the literary, the classical, the classical tradition is strong on the other (Robert D. Hamner, 1993).

Struggle for identity in *A Far cry from Africa*

In *A Far cry from Africa* he grapples the issue of conflicting loyalties and therefore asks,

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both, or give back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cool?

How can I turn from Africa and live? (Walcott, Derek, 2007)

While in rejecting the notion of racial memory which seemed to be frequently relied on romantic notion of racial unity and collective memory is an idyllic African past, Walcott goes on to say,

so now we are entering the African “ phase with our pathetic African carvings, poems and costumes and our art objects are not sacred vessels placed on altars, but goods placed on shelves for the tourist. The result is not one’s own thing but another minstrel show (Pier Paolo Frassinelli, Ronit Frenkel, David Watson, 2011).

Though an amnesiac state has been created resulting in extreme pain and anxiety for what matters most of the people the loss of history, the amnesia of the races [and] what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessity as invention. For in *Omeros* the poet through the micro orgasm of his aging mother’s sensibility and his own feelings of alienation attempts to rejuvenate the lost past and its agonies when he utters,

It was another country, whose excitable
gestures I knew could not connect with my mind,
like my mother’s amnesia; untranslatable...
with tongues of a speech I no longer understood,

but where my flesh did not need to be translated (Roberts, 2001,2003).

While on the other hand AK Ramanujan’s intellectual honesty of his Indian experiences, his voracious reading not only outweighs his involvement in the American life for his description of the Chicago life in,

great laboratory presents not only his inner self but also the indelible impressions of the West on his psyche. The ecstasy and relief in his revisiting the lost dimension of his origins, his attribution of the Hindu ethos with boldness and strong reasons expresses his nostalgia which inculcates him to suggest that one should be reconciled to the world of flux.

An attempt is made by him to establish the eastern and the western culture for in his poetry he attempts:

to connect god, gods all creation; and god of myth, the god of philosophy, the god in the temple and the god within speaker subject, listeners; good and evil, hell and heaven, mythic then and poetic now opposites and contraries (Pandey, 2001).

Though Ramanujan emphasizes upon the theme of familial relations India's glorious cultural heritage, Hindu myths and legends Hindu gods and the standards of living but he does not hesitate to blend his overall verses and occidental mind in a harmonious way. Taking into consideration *The Striders* in which Ramanujan attempts "to summon from hinterland of memory buried moments of suspension surprise and agony" as he says,

I should smile, dry-eyed
 And nurse martins like the Marginal man
 but sorry. I cannot unlearn
 conventions of despair.
 They have their pride
 I must seek and will find
 my particular hell only is my
 hindu mind

Concern for people

In *Self Portrait* Ramanujan does not hesitate to present the modern man's concern with the self and the matrix within which the relevance of self comes to forefront:

I resemble everyone
 But myself, and sometimes see
 In shop-windows
 Despite the well known laws
 of optics
 The portrait of stranger,
 date unknown
 often signed in a corner
 by my father (Basavaraj S. Naikar, 2003).

One can very well see the image of consciousness that binds him to his tradition even though he doesn't lives in a different country as he mentions,

You are Hindoo, aren't you?

You must have second sight (Basavaraj S. Naikar, 2003).

For it is believed that the self of the poet, that is the poet persona in the poem of Ramanujan,

remains as an institutive world, but this is amended by changed circumstances and decisions. The essential self changes, develops it grows from the seeds in the past towards a future which while unknowable is already being formed.

Ramanujan's concern for the society

In an attempt to give grandeur to rituals, traditions and ceremonies Ramanujan ponders upon the fact that his father's death and cremation brought nothing to the family except debt and daughters. One can find an air of consciousness in all of his poems. For he does not like the escapist tendencies of the people around him who even fail to face the challenges and adversaries of life. For example in *One Two may be Three Argument against Suicide* he initiates to bring out the loftiness and emptiness of death. Addressing the person who attempts to commit suicide he says,

Don't forget, dear departing saint
 You see red; you faint at the sight of blood.
 And there is always the danger
 You may be understood, as never
 before, misconstrued by some
 casual strange (Molly Daniels-Ramanujan, 2004).

Suicide being no solution to the problem and the one who attempts suicide becomes nothing but,

a mere odourless soul
 A see-through-man-strapped hole
 In the air, a late lamenting ghost
 looking in vain for an empty seat (Nannaparaju, Dr.Pratima).

Being influenced by the post war British and American poet the modern poets like Ramanujan and others gave concrete examples and experiences of the man living in the modern world. AS Nagarajan rigidly remarks:

it is here that poetry becomes a walk barefoot in to reality and an effacement of the ego. The concrete for them invariably carries the aroma of the private life of the experiencing self. They are mostly concerned with themselves and the surroundings nearby. Their poetry record the artist's own life history and his struggle against himself (U. S. Rukhaiyar, 2002).

Cultural criticism

One can find a true cultural criticism in *A River* for the poet attempts to imitate the old but not by looking at the reality. On visiting Madurai he experiences that,

the river has water enough
 to be poetic
 about only once a year
 and then
 it carries away
 in the first half-hour

three village houses... (Manmohan Krishna Bhatnagar, 2002, p. 155).

Ramanujan believed that past is less a source of value and pride than being a collection of the accumulated chaos. Reflecting upon the great house as a monumental source of society's history and culture he says,

Sometimes I think that nothing
that ever comes into this house
goes out. Things that come in everyday
to lose themselves among other things
lost long ago among
other things lost long ago; (Elleke Boehmer, 2011).

A narrative intends to deliver the colonized form from its discursive status thereby serving as the illegitimate and refractory foil to the Europe but scruples no position in the totalizing notion of epistemic violence. Though in an attempt to display the traditional anti-colonist representation of the agonistic force which is thereby locked up in a struggle within the unfiguration of the discursive transition it doing nothing more than just serving:

the place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of disposal as I've proposed, is revelry entirely in the outside or implacably oppositional.

Be it Indian or the African for both imperialism's epistemic bellicosity did nothing more than decimating old culture thereby leaving the colonized without a ground for leaving a space for them to utter unfrontational words, by means of an incommensurable solicitations and heterogeneous social practices. In the words of VS Naipul we can therefore understand that,

To be a colonial was to know a kind of security. It was to inhibit a fixed world. And I suppose that in my fantasy had seen myself coming to England as to some purely literary region where untrammelled by the accidents of history or backgrounds could make a romantic career for me as a writer. But in the new world I felt that the ground moved below me... Conrad... has been everywhere before me. Not as a man with a cause, but a man offering a vision of the world's half-made societies... Where always 'something inherent in the necessities of successful action carried with it the moral degradation of the idea'. Dismal but deeply felt: a kind of truth and half a consolation (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, 1995).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology adopted is fundamental research.

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