



IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH ON INDIAN CULTURE, ART, AND SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THAI RAMAYANA RAMAKIEN

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ABSTRACT:

Throughout history, cultural exchanges between nations have played a vital role in shaping societies and their artistic expressions. The Global South, encompassing a diverse array of nations in Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, has significantly influenced cultural narratives and practices in various regions. One such poignant example is the transformation of the Indian epic *Ramayana* into the Thai, *Ramakien*, which reflects how cross-cultural interactions can lead to unique adaptations that resonate with local beliefs and traditions. This essay aims to explore the intricate ways in which the Global South has impacted Indian culture through art and societal norms, particularly by analyzing the Thai version of *Ramayana*. By examining the *Ramakien's* themes, characters, and its integration into Thai culture, we can obtain insight into not just a literary transformation but also broader socio-cultural dynamics at play within these interconnected regions. Ultimately, this paper seeks to illuminate how such variations serve as a testament to cultural resilience and creativity amid globalization.

KEYWORDS:

GLOBAL SOUTH, GLOBAL NORTH, THAI RAMAYANA, LESS ECONOMICALLY DEVELOPED, CULTURAL HERITAGE.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of the Global South refers to countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Oceania that are generally less economically developed than those in the Global North. Despite economic disparities, the Global South has a rich cultural heritage that has profoundly influenced and enriched global culture, including that of India. This paper delves into the impact of the Global South on Indian culture, art, and society, with a particular emphasis on the Thai *Ramayana*, *Ramakien*.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE RAMAYANA

The journey of the *Ramayana* from India to Thailand is a fascinating tale of cultural exchange influenced by trade, migration, and religious interactions. During the first millennium CE, as Indian traders navigated through Southeast Asia, they brought with them not only goods but also stories and religious texts, including the *Ramayana*. The spread of Hinduism and later Buddhism played a significant role in this transfer. As these religions took roots in various parts of Southeast Asia, local cultures began to adapt Indian epics, integrating them into their own traditions. In Thailand, particularly during the Sukhothai and Ayutthaya periods, the *Ramayana* was reinterpreted and absorbed into Thai culture, resulting in unique adaptations such as the *Ramakien*. This adaptation not only retained core narratives but also infused local elements, reflecting the Thais' identity and societal values. Historical interactions, such as the Khmer Empire's influence on early Thai society, further facilitated this exchange. The presence of Indian art, literature, and performance traditions provided a rich tapestry for the

Ramayana's integration. These exchanges are an illustrious example of how cultural narratives travel across borders, evolving and intertwining with local customs, thus enriching both Indian and Thai heritage. The *Ramayana's* journey exemplifies the intricate relationships formed through cultural diffusion, highlighting the dynamic nature of storytelling and its capacity to transcend geographical and cultural boundaries.

CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND TRANSFORMATION

As the *Ramayana* was woven into the fabric of Thai culture, the *Ramakien* emerged as a distinct adaptation that not only preserved the original narrative but also reflected the unique cultural values and beliefs of Thailand. This transformation was influenced by historical interactions, such as those with the Khmer Empire, which facilitated the exchange of artistic and literary elements between cultures. The integration of Indian motifs with local customs allowed for a rich reimagining of characters and themes, showcasing the Thais' emphasis on virtues such as loyalty, honour, and the cosmic order, or "Dharma." The *Ramakien* diverges from its source text by emphasizing moral lessons that resonate with Thai social norms, such as respect for authority and community cohesion. The *Ramakien* serves not just as a reflection of religious and philosophical beliefs but also as a vehicle for expressing collective identity, thereby reinforcing societal values through performing arts, such as traditional dance and theatre. This cultural continuity demonstrates how stories can adapt to meet the needs of different societies while retaining their core messages, ultimately enriching

both the original and adapted narratives (S. Kim et al., 2021).

CULTURAL EXCHANGE AND INFLUENCE

Cultural exchange between India and other Global South countries has been a two-way street, enriching both sides. Indian culture has been influenced by various elements from the Global South, including language, cuisine, and religious practices. For instance, the spread of Buddhism from India to Southeast Asia has led to significant cultural exchanges, influencing art, architecture, and literature in both regions.

THE RAMAKIEN: A CASE STUDY

The *Ramakien*, Thailand's national epic, is a Thai adaptation of the Indian epic Ramayana. This adaptation is not merely a translation but a comprehensive reimagining that incorporates Thai cultural elements, aesthetics, and values. The *Ramakien* reflects Thai traditions, clothing, weapons, and topography, making it a unique cultural artifact that bridges Indian and Thai cultures.

LITERATURE AND PERFORMING ARTS

The *Ramakien* has had a profound impact on Thai literature and performing arts. It is celebrated through various traditional Thai art forms, including Khon dance and theater performances. These performances are characterized by elaborate costumes, intricate masks, and stylized movements, all of which are deeply rooted in Thai culture. The *Ramakien's* influence extends to Thai literature, where it has inspired numerous adaptations and reinterpretations.

VISUAL ARTS

The visual arts in Thailand have also been significantly influenced by the *Ramakien*. Temples and palaces across Thailand are adorned with murals and sculptures depicting scenes from the *Ramakien*. These artworks not only showcase the artistic skills of Thai craftsmen but also highlight the cultural exchange between India and Thailand. The *Ramakien* murals at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha in Bangkok are a prime example of this artistic fusion where Ravana is depicted as a guard at the entrance of the temple.

SOCIETAL IMPACT

The influence of the Global South on Indian society is evident in various aspects, including social structures, gender roles, and community practices. The *Ramakien*, for instance, reflects the integration of Indian and Thai societal norms. The story's central theme of the struggle between good and evil resonates with Thai Buddhist beliefs, where the Dharma (righteousness) is represented by Phra Ram, an early incarnation of the Lord Buddha, and the darker forces are represented by the demon king Tosakanth.

ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The broader economic and political relationships between India and other Global South countries have facilitated cultural and societal exchanges. Trade, migration, and diplomatic relations have all played a role in fostering these interactions. The exchange of goods, ideas, and people have led to a more interconnected and resilient global economy, benefiting both India and its Global South partners.

CONCLUSION

The impact of the Indian culture on Global South, on its art, and society is profound and multifaceted. The Thai adaptation of the Ramayana, the *Ramakien*, serves as a compelling case study of this cultural exchange. By examining the influence of the *Ramakien* on Thai literature, performing arts, visual arts, and societal norms, we gain a deeper understanding of how the Global South has been shaped and enriched by Indian cultural and societal landscapes, and, in turn contributing, significantly, to the edifice of rich Indian tradition of literature.

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