



Comparative Indian Literature

KEYWORDS

Quantitative electroencephalography -Fast Fourier transformation

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Two major Indian literatures Sanskrit and Tamil are ancient, while the rest of an average age of eight to nine hundred years - except one recent arrival in the nineteenth century as an outcome of the colonial Western impact (Indian English). Although some of these literatures are more substantial than others and contain greater complexities, no further gradation into major and minor is usually made. A writer in any one language is counted as much Indian by the Sahitya Akademi as a writer in any other and no distinction is made between one literature prize and another. Thus, while there is a plurality of so-called major literatures in India, scholars are confronted by a particular problematic question : Is Indian literature, in the singular, a valid category, or rather should it be spoken as Indian literatures in the plural?

However most scholars are still single literature specialists. Similarly, literary histories written in India by Indian scholars also focused and still focus on a single literature. This single-focus perspective is a result of both a colonial and a post-colonial perspective, the latter found in the motto of the Sahitya Akademi: "Indian literature is one though written in many languages" (S. Radhakrishnan). However, many scholars opposed this perspective and argued that a country where so many languages coexist should be understood as a country with literatures (in the plural).

Some scholars argue that there is unity in diversity in Indian Literature; however this maxim to some is a type of intrusion on the individualities of the diverse literatures. In other words, a cultural relativist analogy is implied here, difference is underlined and corroborated by the fact that both writers and readers of particular and individual literatures are overwhelmingly concerned with their own literatures. It is from this perspective that to the Akademi's motto 'Indian literature is one though written in many languages', the retort is 'Indian literature is one because it is written in many languages.'¹ (qtd in Amiya Dev, p.4)

India being a country of immense linguistic diversity is thus a country of many literatures. Based on history, ideology, and often on politics, scholars of literature argue either for a unity of Indian literature or for a diversity and distinctness of the literatures of India. In India the study of literature involves the notion of the interliterary process and a dialectical view of literary interaction. It should be remembered that Indian homogeneity has the weight of tradition behind it.

Aijaz Ahmad argues, "The problem is in the "Indian" archive of literature. Indianness ultimately proves limited when compared with the different literature comprised in each of the twenty-two literatures recognized by the Sahitya Akademi. While it is evident that in each of these

languages and literatures there is material taken from the others or another, their totality does not constitute one archive. Rather, they constitute twenty-two different archives."² (qtd in Amiya dev, pp.4-5)

Thus Indian literature is neither a simple unity as hegemonists of the nation-state persuasion would not like it to be, nor a simple diversity as relativists or poststructuralists would like it to be. Majumdar suggests that "Indian literature is neither "one" nor "many" but rather a systemic whole where many sub-systems interact towards one in a continuous and never-ending dialectic. Such a systemic view of Indian literature predicates that we take all Indian literatures together, age by age, and view them comparatively."³ (p.7)

Comparative study of various literatures in the West and in India is not quite the same. The fact that Indian Literatures are a product of multicultural, social-historical mélange cannot be overlooked. Also, common socio-cultural and historical bonds bind writers with common linguistic background and from different linguistic background.

In the Indian context a two-fold approach has to be taken towards Comparative literature: first, the influence of European writers on our writers and vice versa. Second the influence of Indian writers of one region on the writers of other regions.

According to Remak literary theory and literary history are interdependent, the former views literature as a simultaneous flow and the latter sees it a continuous flow. Indian literary history is made up of several histories but at the same time there are certain common currents, which connect different streams. In India the Bhakti movement can be called a kind of Renaissance and Reformation put together.⁴ (Chellappan.p.9) However the other noticeable Renaissance was at the beginning of the Modern period in which Indian culture simultaneously recovered its ancient roots and also accepted the new Western humanism.⁵(Bijoy Kumar Das,p.6)

In Indian literary history there is a significant correlation between certain political events and literary periods, e.g. 1857 marks the rise of the Indian novel and all of them deal with plunging onto modernity, symbolised by women's quest for freedom and identity.

The study of the literature of any one Indian language cannot be properly taken up in total exclusion of the others. It is needless to say that comparative study of literature broadens the horizon of our literary study and gives a cosmopolitan view. Hence the study of Indian comparative literature can be transnational or international.

The Relationship between Comparative Literature and Translation

The existence of comparative literature depends a lot on translation. Comparative literature is dedicated to the study of literature from an international perspective; it hinges upon the art of translation. Literature, art, culture and ideas do not develop in isolation, but draw upon, for example, other works of art, historical movements, political views, religious beliefs and cultural concepts from near and far. The study of comparative literature explores this process of cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary translation as well as inter-lingual translation that makes such examination possible. Translation studies as a discipline promotes the cause of comparative literature.

Translation has come a long way from mere imitation of the original to a 'compound art of reading and writing' simultaneously. The use of translation is invaluable in the study of comparative literature in a multi-lingual and multi-cultural context. Susan Basnett and Andre Lefevere have emphasized this in the following words: "With the development of translation studies as a discipline in its own right, with a methodology that draws on comparatistics and cultural history, the time has come to think again, translation has been a major shaping force in the development of world culture and no study of comparative literature can take place without regard to translation." 6 (Basnett and Lefevere, p.160)

Comparative literature is a study of intertextuality. For example if we have to compare a novel of English with one of Kannada we have to use either English or Kannada but if we have to compare a Bengali novel (a language which is unknown to us) we have to read first an English version of the Bengali novel and then compare it with the Kannada novel and use either Kannada or English, the two languages we know, as the medium of assessment. What is suggested here is that it is through translation we read the literature written in a language which we do not know and therefore, translation becomes a tool for the study of comparative literature. "Translation brings intertextuality to our knowledge and that intertextuality is the core of comparative literature".7 (B.K. Das, p.126)

Without translation comparative literature is unthinkable. It deals with two languages which are the basic ingredients of comparative literature. Translation of one regional literature into another regional literature provides an opportunity to make a comparative study of them. In India it is inevitable. As B.K.Das says: "Translation has proven as a major factor for the development of culture all over the world. As a discipline it has attracted the attention of translators and scholars everywhere in the late 20th and early 21st century. It brings a correlation between literature and culture in every multi-lingual and multi-cultural society. Hence translation highly promotes the cause of comparative literature".8 (p.133)

It can be said that translation is an essential factor in the study of comparative literature, which is concerned with patterns of connections of literature across both time and space. In a multi-lingual and multi-cultural country like India comparative literature helps in creating an all India ethos and brings regional literature for meaningful study. Thus the study of translation of regional literatures leads to the study of comparative literature.

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