

Audience Geared: Orality is audience geared with the listener intervening. It is an open structure, ending is always temporary, and subject is highly moldable. Oral traditions assess intelligence not as extrapolated from contrived textbooks but as situated in operational contexts. Homer's Iliad and odyssey were basically oral creations (metrical formulaic). Oral communication unites people whereas writing and reading are solitary activities that throw the psyche back on itself. Oral people externalize schizoid behavior whereas literate people interiorize it. Writing and print isolate, there is no collective noun or concept for readers corresponding to audience. Jacques Derrida said that there is no linguistic reference of sound. Writing emerged out of orality- writing establishes context free language/ autonomous discourse because it is detached from its author but oral discourse is not context. Free. In fact texts are inherently contumacious. Plato in Phaedrus says writing is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind, it is a manufactured product. Writing like computers destroys memory and is passive.

Indian Context: In Indian context oral, tribal are not the residue of the past or the uncivilized behaviour but it is the continuity of the rich culture. Orality is timeless and unanchored from age to age – oral narratives are additive and accumulative and the teller has the full freedom. Prose narratives (*katha*) in oral tradition are allegorical and didactic, of practical wisdom and are of varied nature like myths, fairy tales, fables-they are grounded in supernatural or historical happenings and about animal. Oral literature travels freely across languages and geographical boundaries and can withstand multiple transformations- additions and subtractions are at work and local colour and idioms are added. In oral literature story is important, it relates to a culture, it is dialogic. Element of fantasy is accommodated easily and used for inspiration and education. Birds and animals that can speak keep watch over human actions.

Conclusion: Walter Ong has argued that literacy is a 'pre-emptive and imperialistic activity' since it displaces other ways of conceptualizing. Historically, all cultures began as oral cultures, and most communities and societies in the world operate, even today, as oral. Oral tradition might appear to have lost its orientation due to the dependence on literate and analytical tools in the production of knowledge, yet it remains the most preferred and useful mode of socialization.

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Is the Discipline really Dead? Interrogation of Relevance of Comparative Literature in Indian Context

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Abstract: Literature may be a universal phenomenon but it is also a product of a nation and finds expression in a specific language. Comparative Literature has negotiated this dialectic of unity and multiplicity, national and universal, central and marginal that operate at the level of language, literature and culture from its birth to its alleged death. To an Indian rooted in the cultural heritage of *Vasudhaiva-kutumbakam* as well as rich multiplicity of hoary literary traditions, the idea of world literature sounds all very well if not avant-garde, though this humanistic notion is extremely problematic as it involves quite contentious issues of representation, canon, otherization, periodization, hegemony and homogenization.

Keywords: Literature, Discipline, Globalization, Tradition.

That a discipline which was declared in crisis by Rene Wellek way back in 1950 stood approximately half a century to officially die speaks volumes about the intrinsic rigour and ineluctable relevance of Comparative Literature (CL). Interestingly enough, the last nail in the coffin of the discipline was driven by none other than the famous *dvarpalika* of Mahashweta Devi in west through her book *Death of a Discipline* (2003). In an otherwise well-intentioned intellectual mission, Spivak's here critiques the parochialism and cultural obscurantism innate to various disciplines like Ethnic Studies / Cultural Studies, postcolonial studies, area studies and comparative literature and their consequent interdisciplinary failure in the age of globalization. While Cultural Studies' is obsessed with "new immigrant" community, postcolonial studies, according to her, with its woeful obsession with India, has failed to provide adequate knowledge of the Other in translated anthologies. She denounced "the arrogance of the cartographic reading of world literature in translation as the task of Comparative Literature," (2003: 73) counter-offering the figure of a 'planetary' conception of Comparative Literature that would strive towards the preservation regional specificities of languages and local identities in the face of the homogenizing discourse of globalization. However, admittedly the idea of yoking together Comparative Literature with Area Studies appears unrealistic at worst and romantic at best, the reason being it insists on the need to learn the language of the Other through the literary method and not simply as a fieldwork. Conceptualization of 'planetary' may be

Spivak's way of interrogating the identitarian politics by which Third World literary Other has been reduced to singular collective category or she may be trying to decolonize the comparative literature from the hegemony of Euro-centric investigation. However, it remains to be critically scrutinized to what extent the model of Comparative Studies, European or Spivakian, can be mapped onto Indian literary space. Issues of disparities and limitations functioning at the level of geopolitics, temporality, literary traditions, aesthetics and poetics are far more complex than can be resolved by a simplistic unitary understanding of Indian literature(s). Besides, in Indian context, there exist indispensable complementarities and convergences between CL and translation in terms of disciplinary goals and objectives. Once they are defined in proper perspective, the role and relevance of Comparative studies in India will be envisioned with some clarity.

Spivak's contentions are valid in so far as they critically examine the universalist-humanist notions undergirding Goethe's proposition of *Weltliteratur* and unitary tendencies internalized by the discipline. Apparently, literature may be a universal phenomenon but it is also a product of a nation and finds expression of in a specific language. Comparative Literature has negotiated this dialectic of unity and multiplicity, national and universal, central and marginal that operate at the level of language, literature and culture from its birth to its alleged death. To an Indian rooted in the cultural heritage of *Vasudhaiva-kutumbakam* (world is a family) as well as rich multiplicity of hoary literary traditions, the idea of world literature sounds all very well if not avant-garde, though this humanistic notion is extremely problematic as it involves quite contentious issues of representation, canon, otherization, periodization, hegemony and homogenization. Apart from this, yet another idiosyncrasy that the discipline has built into its methodology and that has been reiterated by Spivak, is the queer desire to undertake comparisons of literary texts in their original languages. Andre Lefevere makes a clever dig at this fallacy by saying,

“...comparatists preferred to write books in language A about the use of metaphors, say, in books written in language B and C, without being in the least concerned whether those books were available in Language A.”
(1995:5)

One of the reasons why the discipline is ostensibly dead today is the irrational fixation on the original. Surprisingly enough, translation has remained on the periphery of comparative literary studies in spite of the glaring identicalities involving the work both a comparatist and a translator undertake i.e. rewriting the text and enhancing the cross-cultural interaction and mutually enriching dialogue. However, while the comparatist is lauded for interpreting the virtuosity of a foreign text, the translator is brought to book for tempering with the original. Conservatives in the field of comparative literary studies, who have been inimical to the participation of translation studies in the formation of

extensive framework for their discipline, “are precisely those who are in practice devoted to the idea of comparative literature limited to (Western) Europe and its historical dependencies, no matter what their theoretical pronouncements may be.” (Lefevere, 1995) Apart from this Eurocentric politics of intelligentsia, the other reason behind the deprecation of translation is primarily embedded in the western Platonic-Christian metaphysics which looks upon a writer as a quasi-divine creator and a translator as a drudge and a proletariat. Romantics who shored up this philosophy justified the intensive translation activity they indulged in by shrewdly propagating a translation mystique of literature being best translated by poets only. The same politics and elitism today underscores the correlation of comparative literature and translation in the institutions of advanced literary studies and humanities in India and abroad.

Such a political otherising of translation came in for severe criticism from prominent literary figures like Ezra Pound and Walter Benjamin whose avant-garde notions 'newness' and the 'organon' of literature changed the complexion of discourse on translation. Deconstruction and reception theory not only liberated translation from the stranglehold of normative theories but also placed it in the centre of mainstream critical discourse. Postulates like a text ceases to be original until it's translated became instrumental in working out the reincarnation of translation as a vector of power, an indispensability, a re-creation. Reception theory predicated the impact of a work of literature on its culture upon the kind of the image that a translator, a critic or an anthologizer created of that work through his discursive interventions. In a similar proposition, Lefevere posits a category of 'Refraction' to refer to all those literary activities like criticism, translation, anthologization and historiography which corroborate or alternatively challenge the canonical values. As he remarks,

“Refractions are made to influence the way in which readers read a text.

As such they are powerful instruments in ensuring the 'right' reading of works of literature and in perpetuating 'right readings'”. (1984:89)

Lefevere makes a plea for marking a departure from the quest for *the* meaning of a given work to an analysis of the conditions under which meaning is or, in practice, meanings are produced, an analysis of the very controls and regulations that have been applied in order to adapt a work of art to a specific ideology/poetics. Such a subversive discourse dismantled the binaries of the original and copy, writer and translator, 'good' and 'bad' and enabled translation to come into its own.

Post-structuralist insights such as these have been very helpful in redefining the operative field and critical tools of Comparative literary studies in Indian context which until then was governed by hegemonic frames of reference borrowed from international discourse on the discipline. The rhetoric of “unity in diversity” and imagining essential Indian culture as reflected in all Indian literature(s) was evidently the fall-out of unified understanding of literature produced by “imagined

community” within limited and sovereign cartography. Until the eighties of the last century, the discipline couldn't rid itself of the deep-seated notion of internationality that Goethe gave it. Thus, scholars like Sisir Kumar Das and Amiya failed to imagine that Comparative Literature can have huge implications for the study of intra-national and intra-traditional literature and insisted on comparative studies involving international texts. (1989) However, the internationalist angle gradually became irrelevant towards the close of the millennium thanks to the synchronous developments that fundamentally redefined the domain. E. V. Ramakrishnan has made an insightful analysis of these context-changing developments in his seminal book *Locating Indian Literature: Texts, Traditions and Translation* (2011). He attributes it first to the poststructuralist discourse as discussed above. Secondly, the path-breaking work done in social sciences and history by Partha Chatterjee, Sudhir Chandra, Ashish Nandy, Sumit Sarkar and others, he says, “provided insights into various contexts that constitute literary texts in Indian languages. The subaltern studies group used literary sources – both oral and written – extensively to read history from below.” (2011: 24) A. K. Ramanujan's empowerment of “little traditions” by his translations of Tamil bhakti poetry and folk tales has to be read in this context. Thirdly, the unprecedented rise of marginalized literatures i.e. those by women and Dalits, both in English and English translation, greatly problematized the conception of a grand, homogeneous Indian literary tradition. All these developments brought out the immense diversity of experience and expression that undergirded literary production in India and apparently ruled out the necessity to bank upon western categories of for understanding native literary traditions.

Though the rejection of western categories of analysis cannot be absolute in Indian context due to a long and dominating colonial intervention, what merits greater attention at the moment is the fact that in India, critical appreciation of even a single literary tradition evolving in a single language requires comparative methodology. And the task of this methodology should be to underscore the essentially hybrid and eclectic nature of these traditions and to ensure that critical narratives of unitary categories do not overpower the discourse. Of late, attempts have been made by scholars of international repute and influence to describe the evolution of Indian literatures around the time of what is called “early modernity” which is situated around sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Indian history. (Pollock, 2003) This academic study stands in danger of dwindling into oriental scholarly categories as it neatly demarcates the *marga* and *desi* traditions in Indian literary history where *marga* referred to Sanskrit and *desi* to vernacular ones. Sheldon Pollock makes a reasonably pertinent analysis of the kind of the relationship shared by these two traditions in medieval and perhaps ancient India. He says,

“...this vernacularity represented not just an alternative to Sanskrit language, but to Sanskrit political and cultural order, indeed the 12th

century Kannada poet Basava is a salient example.” (2003: 8)

What is intriguing about Pollock's analysis here is not only the uncertainty and ambivalence as to the periodicity of early modernity in Indian subcontinent but the facility with which it locates the *desi*, the vernacular as an exclusive binary opposite of *marga*, the cosmopolitan. E. V. Ramakrishnan highlights the inadequacy of this approach through the example of a ninth century Kannada text *Kavirajamarga*, written by Srivijaya, that, in spite of being a part of well-developed vernacular Kannada tradition, integrated the virtuosity of Sanskrit and local poetics, the cosmopolitan and vernacular traditions. What is so ingenious and radical about the Srivijaya's endeavor is the fact that he drew on aspects of the cosmopolitan without being overwhelmed by it and juxtaposed them with those of the local without undermining it. This feature of the vernacular's integrative poetics and regional identity is terminologized by D. R. Nagaraj as “universal desi” which overlapped with Sanskrit poetics and stylistics and “regional desi” which was “radically oppositional” and relied on the folk practices. (Pollock, 2003: 360) What is noteworthy here is the fact that traditions of regional languages in India were essentially dialogic in nature. They were constituted of multiple traditions, poetics and styles and consequently should be understood in the context of their essential hybridity housing the mainstream and the margin, the colonial and the pre-colonial, the written and the oral. This becomes evident in the context of Bhakti movement that aimed at an enormous democratization of literary language, morphed the cultural forms of caste hegemony in favour of the artisans and peasants, put up a brave front against Brahminical domination and problematized of the gender construction of all dialogic relations. (Ahmed, 1992) It is well-known that translation played a seminal role in accomplishing this mission. Tulsi Das's Hindi reworking of *Ramayana* and Jnaneshwara's free Marathi translation of *Bhagavadgita* are the epitomes of the characteristic Indian tradition of translation marked unequivocally by ideological shifts and radical subversions. In what might have appeared a blasphemous move to Western translation theorists, Jnaneshwara extends the dialogic structure of original *Bhagavadgita* from three levels to five, seamlessly incorporating discourses between his guru Nivrittinath and him at one level and between him and his disciple Satchidanand at the other. “In adding these levels” remarks Indranath Choudhury, “the poet endows legitimacy on the oral as a form of literature as valid as the written emphasizing thereby that the *Jnaneshwari Gita* is more a *suta* (to be sung in another language) than a *mantra* (Sanskrit verse) text.” (2010)

Tradition of modernist poetry evolved in various regional languages evolved in the interstices of multiple literary traditions. The medium and idiom of Indian modernism was a corollary of constant and complex transactions and miscegenation between English and regional languages, sustained and strengthened by an intimate engagement with and

translations of bhakti literature by poets like Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and A. K. Ramanujan. The little magazines of the era carried English poetry of the contemporary young poets and their translations of bhakti poetry simultaneously. This straddling of the past and present, contemporaries and ancestors, indigenous and alien had a unique implication for literary historiography on the one hand and reflected, on the other, a two-dimensional “secular Indian sensibility to which the rejection of Indigenous culture and religion, relegating them to the realm of superstition and irrationality, would be an important act on the one hand; as would, on the other, its recovery of that very culture as a life-giving, if perennially problematic part of itself” (Chaudhuri, 2008). Amit Chaudhuri here beautifully identifies the essential hybridity and paradoxes of Indian subjectivity which is unequivocally the product of the concourse of oppositions and contradictions.

The foregoing explication can help bring out a few astute conclusions which can open newer vistas of engagement and analysis to Comparative Literature in India. First, translation has been in the thick of conflictual and dialogic evolution of literary traditions and movements in India for centuries now and Comparative literature cannot do without it. The ever-enhancing cornucopia of English translations from regional languages is heartening, but Comparative Literature cannot depend entirely on them because English fails to reflect the folk or the pre-colonial component of the vernacular i.e. the force of dialect, locality, folk music and regional identity. Secondly, what is lost in translation i.e. internal differences, political subtext of caste, class, gender, region and religion, conflicting worldviews etc. has to be recovered through a rigorous comparative analysis. Gurbhagat Singh's notion of “differential multilogue” proposes the formulation such a program under the umbrella of comparative literature whereby diversity and dynamics of regional literatures can be appreciated without forfeiting the individualism of the particulars. In order to do this systematically and substantially, comparatists will have to draw insights from other disciplines like cultural studies, social sciences, ethnography, gender studies and postcolonial studies and fuse them into the way in which different oppositional discourses in regional literatures get communicated. Thirdly, essentialist formulations of literature of “Indian” or regional kind have to be resisted. The tide of revivalist, materialist forces that have threatened to homogenize the multi-religious and transcultural identity of this ancient civilization by selective capturing of past can be stemmed and subverted only when a new lease of life is given to the discipline that might have been dead in west but can be resurrected in India.

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