

# Comparative Literature in India: An Overview of its History

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## Abstract:

The essay gives an overview of the trajectory of Comparative Literature in India, focusing primarily on the department at Jadavpur University, where it began, and to some extent the department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies in the University of Delhi, where it later had a new beginning in its engagement with Indian literatures. The department at Jadavpur began with the legacy of Rabindranath Tagore's speech on World Literature and with a modern poet-translator as its founder. While British legacies in the study of literature were evident in the early years, there were also subtle efforts towards a decolonizing process and an overall attempt to enhance and nurture creativity. Gradually Indian literature began to receive prominence along with literatures from the Southern part of the globe. Paradigms of approaches in comparative literary studies also shifted from influence and analogy studies to cross-cultural literary relations, to the focus on reception and transformation. In the last few years Comparative Literature has taken on new perspectives, engaging with different areas of culture and knowledge, particularly those related to marginalized spaces, along with the focus on recovering new areas of non-hierarchical literary relations.

**Keywords:** decolonizing process, creativity, cross-cultural literary relations, interdisciplinarity

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## The beginnings

Long before the establishment of Comparative Literature as a discipline, there were texts focusing on comparative aspects of literature in India, both from the point of view of its relation with literatures from other parts of the world—particularly Persian, Arabic and English—and from the perspective of inter-Indian literary studies, the multilingual context facilitating a seamless journey from and between literatures written in different languages. The idea of world literature gained ground towards the end of the nineteenth century when in Bengal, for instance, translation activities began to be taken up on a large scale and poets talked of establishing relations with literatures of the world to promote, as the eminent poet-translator Satyendranath Dutta in 1904 stated, “relationships of joy” (Dutta 124). The talk by Rabindranath Tagore entitled “Visvasahitya” (meaning “world literature”), given at the National Council of Education in 1907, served as a pre-text to the establishment of the department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University in 1956, the same year in which the university started functioning. The National Council of Education was the parent body of the University and the Council was established by a group of intellectuals in order to bring about a system of education that would be indigenous, catering to the needs of the people and therefore different from the British system of education prevalent at the time. Tagore (639) used the word “visvasahitya” (world literature), and

stated that the word was generally termed “comparative literature”. His idea of “visvasahitya” was complex, marked by a sense of a community of artists as workers building together an edifice, that of world literature. The notion of literature again was deeply embedded on human relationships, and hence the aesthetic sense was linked with the sense of the human. Buddhadeva Bose, one of the prime architects of modern Bangla poetry, did not fully subscribe to the idealist visions of Tagore, for he believed it was necessary to break away from Tagore to be a part of the times, of modernity, but he too directly quoted from Rabindranath’s talk on “visvasahitya” while writing about the discipline, interpreting it more in the context of establishing connections, of ‘knowing’ literatures of the world. Bose, also well-known for his translations of Baudelaire, Hoelderlin and Kalidasa, wrote in his preface to the translation of *Les Fleurs du Mal* that his intention in turning to French poetry was to move away from the literature of the British, the colonial masters, while in his introduction to the translation of Kalidasa’s *Meghdutam*, he wrote that it was essential to bring to life the literature of ancient times in a particular tradition in order to make it a part of the contemporary. Without reading too much into these statements, one cannot but mark the beginnings of a decolonizing process that would then also remain somewhere at the heart of comparative literature pedagogy in the country. Buddhadeva Bose brought in a very significant modern poet, Sudhindranath Dutta, also well-known for his translation of Mallarmé and his erudition both in the Indian and the Western context, to teach in the department of Comparative Literature. Of the first five students in the department, three became well-known poets and the fourth a fine critic of Bengali poetry. The person who took charge from Buddhadeva Bose was again a poet, Naresh Guha, who remained as Chairperson of the department for two decades. In an interview given to us in his last years he emphasized the role of the department in fostering an intensely creative environment. That was one of the major goals envisioned by the early architects of comparative literature in the country – a unique one perhaps in its history.<sup>1</sup> Despite certain impulses towards a decolonising process, the colonial framework was also evident in the pedagogic structure, in the large space given to English literature and the organization of the courses around the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the Romantic and the Modern period. Of course, there were several other courses devoted to Sanskrit and Bengali literature. The epistemology of comparison emerged within this framework.

Although it is impossible to speak of the epistemology of comparison with reference to a diverse group of individuals, the emerging contours of the discipline did reveal certain prerogatives. In the early stages it was a matter of recognizing new aesthetic systems, new visions of the sublime and new ethical imperatives – the Greek drama and the Indian *nataka* - and then it was a question of linking social and historical structures with aesthetics in order to reveal the dialectic between them. The first syllabus offered by the department in 1956 was quite challenging. There was a considerable section of Sanskrit literature along with Greek and Latin literature and then Bengali, its relation with Sanskrit literature and its general trajectory, and then a large section of European literature from the ancient to the modern period. Greek and Sanskrit scholars were a part of the faculty and the ancient period did receive a lot of importance, as it still does today, for it is there that a field is offered to work out comparisons on quite a large scale, outside the domain of contact or relation. Comparisons between the *Iliad* and the *Ramayana*, and between Sanskrit and Greek drama taking both Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Bharata’s *Natyasastra* into consideration formed the core of a section of the syllabus. While similarities were highlighted, differences led to the comprehension of core areas of cultural components. The project did not “bring into existence a new object/subject of knowledge” (Radhakrishnan 458 ) as such, but by laying out the terms of comparison it did start a chain of reflections that would constitute the materiality of comparison, an ongoing series of engagements with the multi-dimensional reality of questions related to the self and the other, to arrive at networks of relationships on various levels. The

1 Eugene Eoyang. *The Promise and Premise of Creativity: Why Comparative Literature Matters*, 2012 (London and New York: Continuum) focuses on creativity as constituting the most relevant aspect of comparative literature.

*Jadavpur Journal of Comparative Literature*, which went on to become an important journal in literary studies in the country, came out in 1961.<sup>2</sup>

### Indian Literature as Comparative Literature

It was actually in the seventies that new perspectives related to pedagogy began to enter the field of Comparative Literature in Jadavpur. Indian literature entered the syllabus in a fairly substantial manner but not from the point of view of asserting national identity. It was rather an inevitable move – if comparative literature meant studying a text within a network of relations, where else could these relations be but in contiguous spaces where one also encountered shared histories with differences? In fact the rallying point of Comparative Literature studies in the country was around this nodal component of Indian literary themes and forms, a focal point of engagement of the Modern Indian Languages department established in 1962 in Delhi University. In 1974, the department of Modern Indian Languages started a post-MA course entitled “Comparative Indian Literature”. A national seminar on Comparative Literature was held in Delhi University organized by Nagendra, a writer-critic who taught in the Hindi department of Delhi University and a volume entitled *Comparative Literature* was published in 1977. However, it was only in 1994 that an MA course in Comparative Indian Literature began in the department. As stated earlier the juxtaposition of different canons had led to the questioning of universalist canons right from the beginning of comparative studies in India and now with the focus shifting to Indian literature, and in some instances to literatures from the Southern part of the globe, one moved further away from subscribing to *a priori* questions related to canon-formation.

The focus on Indian Literature within the discipline of Comparative Literature led to the opening up of many areas of engagement. Older definitions of Indian literature often with only Sanskrit at the centre, with the focus on a few canonical texts to the neglect of others, particularly oral and performative traditions, had to be abandoned. One also had to take a more inclusive look at histories of literature in different languages of India which were discrete histories based on language and did not do justice to the overlap between social formations, histories and languages, and to the multilingualism that formed the very core of Indian literature. The task, comparatists realized was, as so aptly voiced by Aijaz Ahmad, to trace “the dialectic of unity and difference – through systematic periodization of multiple linguistic overlaps, and by grounding that dialectic in the history of material productions, ideological struggles, competing conceptions of class and community and gender, elite offensives and popular resistances, overlaps of cultural vocabularies and performative genres, and histories of orality and writing and print” (Ahmad 265). Comparatists dealing with Indian literature also necessarily had to look at the interplay between the mainstream and the popular, the elite and the marginalised and also to some extent foreground intermedial perspectives as different forms existed together in a composite manner, particularly in earlier periods in which textual and performative traditions existed simultaneously. Dealing with Indian literature from a comparative perspective also meant looking at the interactions taking place with literatures in regions beyond the geo-political boundaries of the nation state. All this would necessarily take up a long period of time. The beginning of the process was seen in the comprehensive and integrative three-volume histories of Indian literature, where Indian literatures were studied not as discrete units but in dialogue with one another, brought out by Sisir Kumar Das, a faculty member at the department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, with support from other members of the department and the Sahitya Akademi. The department continues

2 The first issue had the following articles: “The Political Failure of German Late Romanticism” by Werner P. Friedrich, “The Necessity of Poetry” by Sudhindranath Datta, “Rossetti’s Poetry and Painting: A Correlated Study” by Satyendranath Roy, “Twins in Suffering: Dostoevsky and Baudelaire” by Buddhadeva Bose, “Franz Kafka : The Judgement” by Werner Rehfeld, “Fate in Drama” by Narendranath Bhattacharya, “Creation and Contrivance: Dryden’s Adaptation of *Antony and Cleopatra* set against the background of his Age” by David McCutcheon, “Rabindranath in the West” by Naresh Guha and “Rabindranath and World Romanticism” by Werner P. Friedrich, “The Necessity of Poetry” by Sudhindranath Datta, “Rossetti’s Poetry and Painting: A Correlated Study” by Satyendranath Roy, and “Rabindranath and World Literature” by Pierre Falon, S.J. From the next issue onwards the journal became bilingual; although there were just a few articles in Bengali, most others continued to be written in English.

to develop teaching material on various aspects of Indian literature from a comparative perspective, beginning from language origins, manuscript cultures, performative traditions along with painting, sculpture and architecture, the history of print culture and questions related to modernity. That Comparative Literature studies necessarily had to be interdisciplinary was highlighted by the pedagogy practiced in the department. T.S. Satyanath developed the theory of a scripto-centric, body-centric and phono-centric study of texts in the medieval period leading a number of researchers in the department to look for continuities and interventions in the tradition that would again lead to pluralist epistemologies in the study of Indian literature and culture. It must be mentioned that situated in Delhi, the department has students from different parts of India including a large section from the North-east of India, that allow multiple points of entry into Indian literary systems along with diverse inter-cultural relations that communities in different parts of India have with different communities outside the borders of the nation state.

### Centres of Comparative Literature Studies

During the seventies and the eighties Comparative Literature was also practiced at a number of centres and departments in the South of India such as in Trivandrum, Madurai Kamaraj University, Bharatidasam University, Kottayam and Pondicherry. Although often Comparative Literature courses were held along with English literature, a full-fledged Comparative Literary Studies department was established in the School of Tamil Studies in Madurai Kamaraj University. A reputed poet, author and critic, K. Ayappa Paniker, from Kerala, must also be mentioned while talking about the south for his work in the area, particularly that related to comparisons of literary theory, and for his book on the narrative traditions of India.<sup>3</sup> In Tamil, apart from studies related to the comparison of texts from two different cultures, Classical Tamil texts were compared with texts from the Greek, Latin and Japanese counterpart traditions. Later in the eighties and the nineties other Centres were established in different parts of the country, either as independent bodies or within a single language department as in Punjabi University, Patiala, Dibrugarh University, Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University, Sambalpur University, Jawaharlal Nehru University and SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. In 1986 a new full-fledged department of Comparative Literature was established at Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Surat, where focus was on Indian literatures in Western India. Also in 1999 a department of Dravidian Comparative Literature and Philosophy was established in Dravidian University, Kuppam. It must also be mentioned that comparative poetics, a core area of comparative literature studies and dissertations, particularly in the South, was taken up as a central area of research by the Visvanatha Kaviraja Institute of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics in Orissa. During this period two national associations of Comparative Literature came into being, one at Jadavpur called Indian Comparative Literature Association and the other in Delhi named Comparative Indian Literature Association. The two merged in 1992 and the Comparative Literature Association of India was formed, which today has more than a thousand members. In the early years of the Association, a large number of creative writers participated in its conferences along with academics and researchers, each enriching the horizon of vision of the other.

### Reconfiguration of areas of comparison

The eighties again saw changes and reconfigurations of areas of comparison at Jadavpur University. In the last years of the seventies, along with Indian literatures, Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* became a part of the syllabus with a few other texts from Latin American Literatures and then Literatures from African countries were included. Questions of solidarity and a desire to understand resistance to oppression along with larger questions of epistemological shifts and strategies to bridge gaps in history resulting from colonial interventions were often the structuring components of these areas in

3 See K Ayappa Paniker, *Indian Narratology*, New Delhi: IGNC, 2003.

the syllabus. Later during the nineties, Area Studies papers on African, Latin American, Canadian literatures and literature of Bangladesh were introduced. The introduction of Canadian Studies was linked with a grant in the area, but gradually a field of studies focusing on oral traditions emerged within the space of comparison. Area studies components in Chinese and Japanese literatures were also framed, but it was not possible to offer the courses in the absence of specialized faculty members. Today, it must be mentioned there are two research scholars in the department pursuing Chinese and Japanese studies with relation to Indian literature. An Area Studies component to study the literatures of Pakistan has also been designed. As for the other Area Studies components, the department today hosts Centres for African, Latin American and Canadian studies where some research work and annual seminars are organized. A few, like the present author, are of the opinion that given the relatively small number of faculty in the department, the Area Studies programmes led to a division of the scarce resources and also diverted attention from some of the key challenges in comparative literature studies in India, namely, the systematic amalgamation of data related to the Indian context and its analysis from comparative perspectives, and also perhaps the mapping of intercultural relations with and among India's neighbouring countries. Components from the diverse Area Studies could possibly have been included as integrated parts of the main curriculum.

Right from the beginning of the discipline in India, cross-cultural relations between Indian literatures and European and American literatures had been in focus. There was again a shift during this period as the term "influence" began to be questioned by several scholars and particularly so in colonised countries where there was a tendency to look for influences even when they were non-existent. The focus therefore shifted to reception in books like the one by the present author entitled *Bibliography of Reception of World Literature in Bengali Periodicals* (1890 – 1990). In several articles as well, one on the reception of the novel in Bengal for instance, the receiver and not the emitter was in focus. This also implied that the receiver was taking elements from another culture in accordance with her own needs or the needs of the system, while the foreign elements underwent a transformation in accordance with forms, elements and ideologies in operation in the system at any given moment. So it was not a question of a dominating culture imposing its literature on another. Reception studies also pointed to historical realities determining conditions of acceptability and hence to complex configurations between literature and history. To give an instance, it seemed that romanticism of a particular kind had an easy access into the realm of Bengali literature, but it was a romanticism that did not accept many of the European elements. Burns and Wordsworth were very popular and it was felt that their romanticism was marked by an inner strength and serenity. The much talked about 'angst' of the romantic poet was viewed negatively. The love for serenity and 'health' went back to the classical period and seemed an important value in the tradition. Again while Shelley and Byron were often critiqued, the former for having introduced softness and sentimentality to Bengali poetry, they were also often praised for upholding human rights and liberty in contrast to the imperialist poetry of Kipling. Contemporary political needs then were linked with literary values and this explained the contradictory tensions often found in the reception of romanticism in Bengal. It must be mentioned that Shelley, the poet of revolt, began to have a very positive reception when the independence movement gathered momentum. In another context, a particular question that gained prominence was whether Shakespeare was imposed on Indian literature, and comparatists showed, as did Sisir Kumar Das, that there were different Shakespeares.<sup>4</sup> Shakespeare's texts might have been imposed in the classroom, but the playwright had a rich and varied reception in the world of theatre. Parsi theatre was rejuvenated by the enactment of the comedies of Shakespeare, political theatre groups appropriated his plays, while critics in different periods interpreted Shakespeare in accordance with the needs of the time. From reception studies the focus gradually turned to cross-cultural reception where reciprocity and exchange among cultures were studied. For example, one tried to study the Romantic Movement from a larger perspective, to unravel its many layers as it travelled between countries, particularly between Europe and India. The translation of several texts from Sanskrit into German played a

4 See Sisir Kumar Das's *Indian Ode to the West Wind: Studies in Literary Encounters*. New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2002. Print.

role in the emergence of the Romantic movement and then in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Romanticism came back to India, though in different shades.

In the late eighties, with Comparative Literature moving out in different directions, it was felt that a more structured approach to the subject was necessary. At Jadavpur, under the guidance of Amiya Dev, who was instrumental in the spread of Comparative Literature in different parts of India in the early years and for giving a direction to the discipline, a Master's syllabus was designed that had genres, themes and literary historiography as its core area and this model was more or less followed in many new departments of comparative literature that would come up later. Reception studies both along vertical and horizontal lines formed the next major area of focus – one studied for instance, elements of ancient and medieval literature in modern texts and also inter and intraliterary relations foregrounding impact and responses. While one studied Vedic, Upanishadic, Buddhist and Jaina elements in modern texts, one also looked at clusters of sermons by Buddha, Mahavira and Nanak, at qissas and katha ballads across the country, the early novels in different Indian literatures, and then the impact of Eastern literature and thought on Western literature and vice versa. Two groups of papers were offered, one with components from Indian literature at the centre and the other with Western literature. The division was not a happy one as students wanted to engage with both in order to have nuanced understandings of the interplay between local, national and transnational forces. With the introduction of the semester system the division was abandoned and certain other courses of a more general nature such as Cross-cultural Literary Transactions, where Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* and Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*, were taken up, or sometimes in courses entitled Literary Transactions one looked more precisely at the tradition of Reason and Rationalism in European and Indian literatures of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries.

### Research directions

The late nineties and the early twenties were a period of great expansion for Comparative Literature research in different parts of the country with the University Grants Commission opening its Special Assistance Programme for research in university departments. Many single literature departments were given grants under the programme to pursue studies in a comparative perspective. The English department of Calcutta University for instance, received assistance to pursue research on literary relations between Europe and India in the nineteenth century. Several books and translations emerged out of the project. The department of English and Comparative Literary Studies at Saurashtra University, Rajkot, took up the theme of Indian Renaissance and translated several Indian authors into English, studied early travelogues from Western India to England and in general published collections of theoretical discourse from the nineteenth century. The Department of Assamese in Dibrugarh University received the grant and published a number of books related to translations, collections of rare texts and documentation of folk forms. The department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University also received assistance to pursue research in four major areas, East-West Literary Relations, Indian Literature, Translation Studies and Third World Literature. Incidentally, the department had in Manabendra Bandyopadhyay, an avid translator who translated texts from many so-called "third-world countries". Conferences were held and research material published in all four areas. In the next phase support was given for publishing text-books in the area and for preparing an infrastructure for the study of Indian literatures. This led to the publication of three texts on genres, themes and literary historiography in the Indian context. Projects related to annotated bibliographies of periodization in histories of literature also resulted in two texts. The different ways of conceiving of periods opened up perspectives on how some of the popular concepts could be revisited. The notion of derived categories for instance, was quite often charged with a host of other significations, as for example, in the case of Romanticism as a term for periodization. Romanticism had very different dimensions in the Indian context and necessitated a different reading within a continuum that situated it often at the source of modernity. Hemanta Kumar Sarma, for instance in his history of Assamese literature divided the modern age into the

pre-Romantic (1830-1889), Romantic (1889 to World War II) and post Romantic or contemporary that he also called post Swaraj (World War II to the contemporary, that is before 1961). Post Romantic simultaneously termed post Swaraj erased simple equations between terms used in European and Indian literatures.

Under the Special Assistance programme the department also conducted eight inter-literary translation workshops translating texts from one Indian language to another without the mediation of English, a process not very common in the field of translation at the time. Preparatory work was held for a few weeks before some of the workshops focusing on arriving at a reading skill in the target language when the language was from a neighbouring region as in the case of Assamese and Odiya in the context of Bengali, or Punjabi in the context of Hindi and so forth, and the workshops were quite a success with several publications. What emerged from an overview of many of the Special Assistance programmes was that there was a concerted effort in different parts of the country to gradually build an archive of material related to the study of Indian literature in its different manifestations including its interactions with other cultures and literatures. The task is immense and yet to be taken up in a consistent manner for longer periods of time.

The department at Jadavpur University was upgraded under the programme to the status of Centre of Advanced Studies in 2005, and research in Comparative Literature took a completely new turn. The need to foreground the relevance of studying literature was becoming more and more urgent in the face of a society that was all in favour of technology and the sciences and with decision makers in the realm of funding for higher education turning away from the humanities in general. The task for departments of humanities and literature was to demonstrate that they were looking into and working with a knowledge system just as any other discipline, only literature's ways of knowing were different. Literature as knowledge system, therefore, became a thrust area for again it was felt that comparative literature with its interdisciplinary formation would be the right place to demonstrate the same. A series of workshops were conducted with scholars from philosophy, history, science and the social sciences to look into areas of creativity and knowledge, to gain greater understanding of ways of knowing. From a very different perspective it was felt that stories, poems, songs and performances from oral traditions that were found in most parts of the country had their own knowledge systems that could provide valuable and sustainable alternatives to contemporary urban modes of life and living and in several cases also reveal certain cultural dynamics and value systems that were constantly replenishing mainstream expressive traditions. A large focus, therefore, in this area was on oral texts and research on methods of engaging with such texts. The project led to documentation and compilation of notes related to experiences of such studies and the collaboration with grassroots artists from rural areas. It must be mentioned at this point that in the late nineties and in the early following decade there was a constant demand for engaging with literatures of marginalized communities in different platforms of comparative literature studies in India, often from such communities. The national association held two major conferences on the subject during the period. A particular project in this area taken up by the department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur was called Vanishing Seeds of Culture based on a study in Bankura district of West Bengal. The objective of this project was to identify the folk cultural forms associated with folk varieties of rice found in Bankura District, document such forms and analyze them to show how they were related to folk varieties of rice and make policy recommendations for the preservation of such varieties and the associated cultural forms. A checklist of different folk varieties of rice still extant in Bankura was prepared, local respondents interviewed and several cultural forms documented. It must be mentioned that Dalit literature was also taken up in courses in some parts of the country, but a lot remains to be done in the area as far as pedagogical practices are concerned. A particularly important question for Comparative Literature in this area could be linked with questions of Dalit literature's relationship with mainstream writing, subverting, questioning and at the same time also inflecting other discourses while continuing to maintain its unique identity based to a large degree on performativity to draw the reader in as an ethical witness to the extreme limits of human suffering on which it is poised.

The second area in the Centre for Advanced Studies was the interface between literatures of India and its neighbouring countries. This happened to be a completely untouched area as far as literature was con-

cerned, apart from the study of certain well-known points of contact. The first preliminary research in this area led to links that suggested continuity and a constant series of interactions between and among Asian cultures and communities since ancient times and the urgent need for work in this area in order to enter into meaningful dialogue with one another in the Asian context and to uncover different pathways of creative communications. Efforts towards this end led to an International Conference on South-South dialogues with a large number of participants from Asian and European countries. An anthology of critical essays on tracing socio-cultural and literary transactions between India and Southeast Asia was published.

Among the projects planned under the inter-Asian series was one on travelogues from Bengal to Asian countries and here an annotated bibliography that could provide an initial foundation for the study of inter-literary relations was published. A second project involved working on the image of Burma in Bengali and Oriya literature in late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Travel narratives and diaries, newspaper articles from old periodicals, excerpts from literature and pictorial images of Burmese people in the Indian press were compiled. A project on the interface between Perso-Arabic and South Asian literatures was also planned and a number of lectures delivered in the area. Earlier, under a different grant, the tradition of Bhakti and Sufi were studied together and a volume was published. Visiting Professors were invited to give several lectures on Japanese and South Korean literatures. A one-day colloquium on Kolkata's Chinese connections was held in collaboration with the H.P. Biswas India-China Cultural Studies Centre of Jadavpur University and a seminar on framing intercultural studies between India and China was held with the Centre and the department of International Relations, Jadavpur University.

### **Interface with Translation Studies and Cultural Studies**

It must be mentioned at this point that Comparative Literature in the country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century engaged with two other related fields of study, one was Translation Studies and the other Cultural Studies. Comparative Literature's relationship with Translation Studies was not a new phenomenon for one or two departments or centres, such as the one in Hyderabad University, which was involved in doing translation studies for a considerable period. Today the university has a full-fledged Centre for Comparative Literature offering courses, and research in Translation Studies is an important area. Almost all departments or centres of Comparative Literature today have courses on Translation or Translation Studies. Both are seen as integral to the study of Comparative Literature. Translation Studies cover different areas of interliterary studies. Histories of translation may be used to map literary relations while analysis of acts of translation leads to the understanding of important characteristics of both the source and the target literary and cultural systems. Other dimensions of literary studies are opened up when one sees translation as rewriting. Translation practices also bring students to engage deeply with other languages and other cultures, leading to insights into the nature of the comparatist's preoccupations. The department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University today has a Centre for the Translation of Indian Literatures.

As for Cultural Studies, Comparative Literature had always engaged with different aspects of Cultural Studies, the most prominent being literature and its relation with the different arts. Today studies in intermediality in Comparative Literature are common. But beyond such studies courses in Comparative Literature also offer modules on Comparative Cultural Studies where key texts in the global field are juxtaposed with related texts from the Indian context. The M Phil course on the subject at Jadavpur University highlights changing marginalities, 'sub-cultures' and movements in relation to contemporary nationalisms and globalization, and also sexualities, gender and the politics of identity. Cultural Studies may also be a key component in different kinds of interdisciplinary courses within the discipline. For instance, a course in Delhi University takes up the theme of city and village in Indian literature and goes into representations of human habitat systems and ecology in literature, looks for concepts and terms for such settlements, goes into archaeological evidences and the accounts of travellers from Greece, China, Persia and Portugal to demonstrate the differences that exist at levels of perception and ideological positions. Again in a course



on performance taught at Jadavpur University the purpose, it is stated, is to look at performance not as an art form, but as a means to study social behavior patterns to understand social processes. It proposes to look into conceptual categories inherent in ritual and theatre and extend them to the reading of behavioural patterns. Ritual and theatre and everyday performativity are then viewed in terms of both separation and integration. In some of the new centres of Comparative Literature that came up in the new universities established in the last Five Year Plan, diaspora studies were taken up as an important area of engagement. It must be mentioned though that despite tendencies towards greater interdisciplinary approaches, literature continues to occupy the central space in Comparative Literature and it is believed that intermedial studies may be integrated into the literary space.

### **Non-hierarchical connectivity**

It is evident that Comparative Literature in the country today has multifaceted goals and visions in accordance with historical needs, both local and planetary. Several University departments today offer Comparative Literature separately at the M Phil level, while many others have courses in the discipline along with single literatures. As in the case of humanities and literary studies, the discipline too is engaged with issues that would lead to the enhancement of civilizational gestures, against forces that are divisive and that constantly reduce the potentials of human beings. In doing so it is engaged in discovering new links and lines of non-hierarchical connectivity, of what Kumkum Sangari in a recent article called “co-construction”, a process anchored in “subtle and complex histories of translation, circulation and extraction” (Sangari 50). And comparatists work with the knowledge that a lot remains to be done and that the task of the construction of literary histories, in terms of literary relations among neighbouring regions, and of larger wholes, one of the primary tasks of Comparative Literature today has perhaps yet to begin. In all its endeavours, however, the primary aim of some of the early architects of the discipline to nurture and foster creativity continues as a subterranean force.

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