

## TRANSLATION AS A GATEWAY TO COMPARATIVE STUDY

**DR. PRERNA A. P. SINGH**

S.S.R. M. MAHILA MAHAVIDYALAYA,  
KHAMGAON, INDIA.

### Abstract

*Comparative study is the study of literature or other cultural expressions across linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is a study of intertextuality. To know ourselves we need to know others. Any event or literature is adequately comprehended only in relation to other events or literatures. Today, we live in a global society. Here language, literatures and cultures intersect and interbreed. That is why it is important to broaden our scope to see the world. Hence the need of comparative study. Comparative study or literature is a reaction against narrow nationalism in the west. Comparative study is an assertion of national as well as cultural identity in the Indian context. The very existence of comparative study depends on translation. It is through translation we read the literature, written in a language which we don't know. 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. Translation brings a correlation between literature and culture in every multilingual and multicultural society. Hence translation highly promotes the cause of comparative study. Translation of one regional literature into another regional literature provides us an opportunity to make a comparative study between them. Translation can never be marginalized. Without it comparative study is unthinkable.*

**Key Words:** - *Intertextuality, Multilingual, Multicultural, Cultural expressions, Linguistic boundaries.*

## TRANSLATION AS A GATEWAY TO COMPARATIVE STUDY

- DR. PRERNA A. P. SINGH

### Introduction: What is Comparative Study?

Comparative study is the study of literature or other cultural expressions across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In Comparative Literature we take into consideration not only two literatures but also two dimensions- linguistic and cultural. Since comparative study is a comparison between two literatures, so it does not have an independent status.

In Comparative Literature not only the similarities, dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures are analysed but the themes, modes, conventions and the use of folk tales, myths in two different literatures or even more, are also studied.

Comparative study of Literature can also be explained as study of intertextuality. Intertextuality means an interrelationship between texts and the way that similar or related texts influence, reflect or differ from each other. Intertextuality is also used to describe the complex relationships that exist between works of literature.

Julia Kristeva was the originator of the notion of intertextuality. Literary theorist Julia Kristeva believed that there is a cohesive force in literature that connects all the various traditions, past and present.

### Origin of Comparative Literature:-

Rene Wellek and Austin Warren draw our attention to the origin of Comparative Literature in their book 'Theory of Literature' in the following words:

"Matthew Arnold, translating Ampere's use of 'histoire comparative' was apparently the first to use the term in English (1848). The French have preferred the term used earlier by Villemanin, who had spoken of 'litterature compare' (1829), after the analogy of Cuvier's Anatomie Compare'e (1800)" (P46).

There is a remarkable sharp rise in interest in the study of comparative Literature all over the world in 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Canada considerable growth of Comparative Literature, has been noticed. The Canadian Encyclopaedia registers the names of well known Canadian comparatists such as Northrop Frye, Victor Graham, D. G. Jones, Ronald

Sutherland and a few others who have contributed immensely to the growth of Comparative Literature in that country.

In Australia, David Myers and a few others of Queensland University have done excellent work in the field of Comparative Literature.

In India, leading comparatists like Chandra Mohan, Amiya Dev, K. Chellappan, Sisir Kumar Das, K. M. George, R. S. Pathak have done commendable job in the field of Comparative Literature.

### **Necessity of Comparative Study:-**

To know ourselves we need to know others. Any event or literature is adequately comprehended only in relation to other events or literature. Today we live in a global society. Here language, literatures and cultures intersect and interbreed. That is why it is important to broaden our scope to see the world. Hence the need of comparative study.

In his book 'Comparative Literature' Bijay Kumar Das says,

"It (comparative Literature) transcends the narrowness, provinciality and parochialism of national and general literatures. The commonplacence of regional writers are shaken when the comparatists study their writings alongwith the writings of other writers in different other languages" (P.4)

Hence Comparative Literature broadens the horizon of our study of literature and gives the readers an opportunity to develop an international outlook

Since comparative literature also means comparative assessment of two literatures so the process of comparing literature widens the critical awareness, corrects the taste and helps in arriving at proper judgement.

### **Comparative Study: Western Context**

In the west the comparative literature began as a reaction against aggressive nationalism. The best example of narrow nationalism can be seen in Thomas Babington Macauley's statement: 'I have never found one among them (orientalists) who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India & Arabia.'(P.125)

Goethe in Germany and Matthew Arnold in England cautioned against narrow nationalism in literature. Goethe used the term 'world literature' in 1827, though his world was limited to Europe. Matthew Arnold warned his fellow critics against the danger of clinging to their own national literature only. He was of the view that every critic should possess at least one great literature besides his own and it would be better if it is more unlike his own literature. It is important to mention here that Arnold's catholicity did not

allow him to seek 'one great literature' beyond Europe. Susan Bassnett rightly observes that Comparative Literature seems to have emerged as an antidote to narrow nationalism.

### **Comparative Study: Indian Context**

Comparative Study is an assertion of national as well as cultural identity in the Indian context. Rabindranath Tagore also spoke about the merits of studying comparative literature in the multilingual context and the situation of our country.

The introduction of comparative literature in India, also helped the Indian literatures in accepting the existence of the other literatures and languages in India.

### **Translation as a Gateway to Comparative Study :-**

In fact the very existence of comparative study depends on translation. It is through translation we read the literatures, written in a language which we do not know. Therefore translation becomes a tool for the comparative study of literature. Translation brings intertextuality to our knowledge and that intertextuality is the core of comparative study of literature. Translation brings the readers, writers and critics of one nation into contact with those of others.

It is through translation we get the opportunity of comparing different literary texts. When a particular literature is translated into another language then immediately its scope gets widened because now it can easily be compared with the original literary text of that language.

- Some evidences: To show how Translation is a Gateway to Comparative Study

Who doesn't know the name of Aesop, the immortal story teller of Greece ? We know him as master story teller only because his stories have been translated into almost all the leading languages of the world. He has made fun of human foibles and weaknesses by using animals as the characters of his stories. Most of them have a moral for the readers. In our own country, animals have been used in the stories of 'Panchatantra' and 'Hitopadesh'. These stories also serve the same purpose of preaching through fun. Had the translation of Aesop's stories not available , how could we see this remarkable similarity between Aesop and ' Panchatantra' or ' Hitopadesh'?

Alexander Dumas , great French novelist and the author of the tremendously popular novel, ' The Three Musketeers' is well known all over the world because the translation of his novels is available and their translations gave the readers and critics wonderful opportunity to read and know him. There translations of his novels also paved the way for comparative study.

Dante Alighieri, the Italian writer of immortal fame could be compared to and placed equal in rank to such literary giants as Goethe, Virgil, Shakespeare, Kalidas and Homer because the translation of his immortal work Divine Comedy gave the readers and critics, an opportunity to know Dante's depth and erudition.

Maxim Gorky, a literary genius who wrote novels, plays, stories and autobiography, is the most discussed and translated authors of the Soviet Union. 'Mother' is his most famous novel which has been translated into all the leading languages of the world, and because of these translations he could get recognition all over the world and these translations also facilitated the comparative study of his novel.

Omar Khayyam, renowned Arabic poet and one of the leading lights of twelfth century who gave a lot to the world is famous in the western world because of his four line 'rubaiyats.' Actually when Fitzgerald translated them in English then his name became known in west. Apart from English his rubaiyats have been translated in other languages also.

Rabindranath Tagore great poet, philosopher, painter, novelist and educationist of India was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his collection of well known poems 'Gitanjali'. Gitanjali could get recognition all over the world because he translated it in English. Now it is open for comparative study also. Had he not translated it in English, it would have remained limited to Bengal only.

Shaikh Musliuddin Sadi was not only a renowned poet but was also the founder of Persian prose. The works of Shaikh Sadi have been translated in most of the important languages of the world. Comparatists consider his place in literature to be higher than Omar Khayyam and Khalil Gibran.

These are some examples of the literary geniuses whose works were translated and due to which they could get recognition all over the world and the scope for comparative study got increased.

If translation is not encouraged and if translation is not accepted as an academic discipline then innumerable jewels of literature will remain hidden just because large numbers of people don't know the language in which they write. In such a situation the cause of comparative study will also be defeated.

- Short Comparative Study of H. W. Longfellow's Psalm of Life and G. D. Neeraj's Muskurakar Chal Musafir (Gopal Das Neeraj is a renowned Hindi Poet. Both the poems are easily available on Internet)

H. W. Longfellow is an eminent American poet of 19<sup>th</sup> century and G. D. Neeraj is a celebrated Hindi poet of 20<sup>th</sup> century. There is a great gap of time, space and culture between them, yet their basic feelings and attitude towards life is same. Both the poets

have very optimistic outlook towards life and aim at bringing about positive change in the attitude of the readers.

Both 'Psalm of Life' and 'Muskurakar....' are motivational and inspiring poems. Both the poems can be read as a rejection of tired passivity and spiritual defeatism. The poems are a blow to the pessimistic attitude towards life. The poems are an urge to the readers for not losing courage under any circumstances.

At some places there is such a similarity of thought that the readers get astonished. For example H. W. Longfellow says :

... And departing leave behind us  
Footprints on the sand of time,  
Footprints, that perhaps another,  
Sailing over life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwrecked brother,

Seeing, shall take heart again.

Same type of thoughts have been expressed in the following lines of 'Muskurakar...'

Yad rakh jo aandhiyo ke samne bhi muskurate  
Ve samaya ke panth par padchinh apne chod jate,  
Chinh ve jinko na dho sakte pralaya toophan ghan bhi,  
Mook rehkar jo sada bhule huon ko path dikhate.

Now large number of people in India know both the languages- English and Hindi. But what about the people of America and Europe. If this poem of Neeraj is not translated in English, then how would they compare and come to know that thousands of kms. away there is a poet who doesn't write in their language but thinks in the same way as their poet thinks. Now here many problems arise :

Problem 1 : If a person doesn't know either Hindi or English then how would he come to know that there exists a similarity in these poems.

Problem 2 : Suppose a person, interested in poetry, reads the above comparison of two poems. If he/she really wants to enjoy and go into the depth of this comparison and wants to judge whether the comparison is correct or not, then he/she should be able to read and understand both the poetry. But he/she knows only English. Then for such readers also there is a need of English translation of this Hindi poetry. Thus from the point of view of he readers also translation of literature is must. Problem 3 : In the western countries there are large number of people who know only English. How would they be able to understand the nearness of Longfellow and Neeraj, of Milton and Hindi poet Surdas ? How would Gorki and Premchand be compared?

Thus, the absence of translations makes the comparative study of literature a difficult proposition. In the absence of translation, the literature of particular language will

remain limited to the people of that language and these people will soon start considering their literature as the best literature and will definitely become victim of narrow outlook.

As far as our situation is concerned we can easily have access to English literature through our knowledge of English. But there is a need of translation of Indian classics in English so that Indian classics can be studied by European students in comparison with their own literatures, just as European classics in English translation will facilitate an Indian student's job to make a comparative study of them with Indian literature.

#### **Need of Translation in Indian Context:-**

Undoubtedly, the comparative study of literature involves translation. In India there is a great need that classical works in regional literature should be translated into English. This will help not only in broadening our outlook of Indian literatures but also further the cause of national integration. It is only through Translation that we can know the merits and demerits of different regional literatures of India, can learn from each other and can make a comparative study of them.

When through translation, several regional literatures of the country will reach the Indians, then only a strong Comparative Regional Literature will develop in our country which will in turn enrich our culture and literature.

#### **Conclusion:-**

It is just impossible to marginalize translation because translation deals with two languages which are the basic ingredients of comparative literature. Without translation comparative study of literature is unthinkable. In fact the use of translation is irreplaceable and inestimable in the study of comparative literature. No one can deny the fact that it is only through translation that a correlation between literature and culture can be brought in multilingual and multicultural societies. So, without hesitation it can be said that translation promotes the cause of comparative study of literature. I feel that the best literature of each and every language should be translated in the international language i.e. English. This will not only encourage and enhance the comparative study but will also promote international integrity and world peace. And I would also like to add that UNO should take initiative in this direction.

**WORKS CITED**

Arnold, Matthew, *Essays by Matthew Arnold*, London , Oxford University Press, 1914.

Bassnett- McGuire, Susan. *Translation studies*, London : Routledge, 1991.

Das, Bijay Kumar, *A Handbook of Translation Studies*, New Delhi , Atlantic Publishers, 2008.

Das ,Bijay Kumar, Ed. *Comparative Littrature*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2000.

Holmes, J. Lambert, J and Lefevere, A. Eds. *Literature and Translation*. Louvain : Acco , 1978.

Toury, G. Ed. *Translation Across Cultures*, New Delhi, Bahri Publications, 1987.



Higher Education &  
Research Society