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New Vistas in Comparative Studies

Ravindra B. Tasildar, M.A.

Introduction

A full-fledged department of *Comparative Literature* was established in JadHAVpur University West Bengal in 1956. It is difficult to say that the discipline of *Comparative Literature* (CL) has made a remarkable progress in Indian universities after the establishment of this department. Jain (1989) and Mohan (1989) have observed that not many departments of English in Indian universities offer courses in *Comparative Literature*. The situation today is just more of the same.

Even when a course in CL is offered it is not taught. For instance, a PG course in CL has remained on paper in Shivaji University, Kolhapur (M.S.) for the last two decades. As the teaching of CL is confined to a handful of universities in India, research in CL is called for so that the discipline may become popular and prosper in the country.

This article is a modest attempt to have a glimpse of some of the explored and unexplored areas of research in CL in Indian universities.

Research in Comparative Literature in Indian Universities

A cursory glance at the section on 'Comparative Studies' in *Indian Doctoral Dissertations in English Studies: A Reference Guide* compiled by Kushwaha and Naseem (2000) reveals that there are theses on influence studies, comparative aesthetics and thematology. It is noticed that 32 % of the doctoral studies in CL ritualistically use the phrase 'a comparative study' in their titles.

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For nearly two decades after independence the comparative literary studies were dominated by influence studies. The main trend was to compare a British school with a school in Indian language. For instance, ‘The English Romantic Poets and the Chhayavad School of Hindi poetry’ (Mathur K.C., 1952, Lucknow University).

Jain (1989) tried to change this trend by suggesting that researchers consider the influence of Rabindranath Tagore on Hindi romantic poetry, i.e., on ‘Chhayavad’.

Gokak (1964), Gowda (1978) and Sastry (1993) asserted the need to pay attention to the study of comparative aesthetics. According to Gokak (1964), “Nothing also is more difficult than to investigate the fundamentals of the two traditions and set forth against that background a comparative study of Bharata and Aristotle, of Coleridge and Abhinavagupta” (Gokak, 1964: 149). The following studies reveal the work in this area.

Year	Title of the Thesis	Researcher	University
1970	Coleridge’s idea of imagination and Abhinavagupta’s idea of Rasa: A comparative study	Mishra, Shrikrishna	Patna
1975	Aristotle and Bharata: A comparative study	Singal, Roshan Lal	Panjab
1990	The theory of drama: A comparative study of Aristotle and Bharata	Rai, R.N.	Magadh

(Source - Kushwaha and Naseem, 2000)

In the last decade of twentieth century there have been studies carried out on the works of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi. Thematic comparisons became the focus here.

Year	Title of the Doctoral Thesis	Researcher	University
1989	The novels of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi: A phenomenological study	Hussaini, Atiya Sultana	Kurukshetra
1992	The outsider in Indian English Fiction with special reference to Arun Joshi and Anita Desai	Madhava Rao, N	Kakatiya
1993	The problem of identity in the novels of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi: A comparative study	Verma, Beena Rani	BHU
1993	The theme of alienation in the novels of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi: A comparative study	Upadhyaya, Ramesh Chandra	Avadh
1995	The theme of alienation in the novels of Anita Desai and Arun Joshi: A comparative study	Prasad, Surat	DEI Agra
1997	The theme of alienation in the novels of Anita Desai, Nayantara Sahgal and Arun Joshi	Shrivastava, Usha	Rewa

(Source - Kushwaha and Naseem, 2000)

The theme of alienation being the prominent one, the duo happened to be the most popular one for comparison.

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Unexplored Areas in Comparative Literature

The research in CL in Indian universities generally rests on the suggestions by Gokak (1964), Gowda (1978), Das (1989), Dev (1989), Mohan (1989), Devy (1993), Sastry (1993), Das (2000), Gupta (2000) and Singh (2000). These scholars have broadened the horizons of CL by suggesting wide ranging areas/topics to be studied in the Indian context. Some of the topics suggested have been over-explored, while some of the areas have not been fully explored.

It seems that enough attention is not paid towards studying the plays of poet-playwrights. A comparative study could be made of the plays of Tennyson, Browning, Nissim Ezekiel and Gieve Patel. According to Das (2000) Ezekiel's play *Don't Call It Suicide* can be profitably read by comparing it with Synge's *Rider to the Sea* (Das, 2000: 163). A comparative study of radio plays and screen plays in English and Indian languages by Mahesh Dattani, Dina Mehta and K. S. Duggal is another area of investigation.

Some Significant Areas for Comparative Study

The significance of comparative study can be understood from the observation of Gupta (2000). He notes that most of our critics extol R.K. Narayan as the best humourist that the country has produced. He further adds, "... any discerning critic who studies S.V.V.'s (S. V. Vijayaraghavachari) dozen or so volumes of essays in a lighter vein such as *Soap Bubbles*, *More Soap Bubbles*, *Chaff and Grain*, *Much Daughtered*, and *Holiday Trip* is sure to be tempted to rate him as a better humourist than R.K. Narayan" (Gupta, 2000:264).

In the light of this observation, it would be better to compare works of humourists (mentioned by Gupta, 2000) like V.V. John, N.G. Jog, Iswar Dutt, R. Bangaruswamy and S.V.V. The humorous writings in Indian languages can also be compared. A comparative study of the humorous writings of P.G. Wodehouse, R.K. Narayan and P. L. Deshpande (Marathi) can be carried out, for instance.

A study of biographies and autobiographies of Indian creative writers, saints, business tycoons, film artists, sportspersons and politicians is one more area for comparison. For instance, a comparative study could be made of biographies such as *Premchand* (tr. Harish Trivedi, 2002) and *Rabindranath Tagore* by Uma Das Gupta (2004). Early autobiographies by Indian women like Krupabai Sathianadhan's *Saguna* and Lakshmi Bai Tilak's *I follow After: An Autobiography* can be compared.

In addition to this, travelogues by women written in Indian languages could be a topic for comparative study. Short stories by contemporary women writers in Bengali and Marathi are worth studying from comparative perspective. Even the literature in English in states like Goa and Kerala can be compared effectively with that of North-East Indian states.

Furthermore, comparative studies in alternative literatures like Dalit studies and Gay and Lesbian studies can be a rewarding experience.

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There are numerous studies on partition literature in Indian universities. We can't afford to ignore the history and literature of the nations like Ireland, Cyprus, North Korea, South Korea and Germany in this regard. Could we explore the possibility of comparing partition literature in the sub-continent with that of West Asia - Palestine and Israel, if available in English translation?

Indian Contact with Western Literature and Consequent Comparative Studies

The Indian contact with the Western literatures is not confined to English alone (Das, 1989:101). Nevertheless, there are innumerable studies on the influence of British literature on Indian literature in English and in Indian languages. There is no substantial work available in English on the influence of other colonizers like Portuguese, French and Dutch on literatures in Indian languages.

Das (1989) mentioned that Portuguese had a direct impact on the Indian languages spoken in Goa. Therefore it would be fruitful to make available in English the studies related to the contribution of Portuguese to the development of literatures in Konkani and Marathi.

It seems that the literature from countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Myanmar, China, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mauritius (Diaspora literature, if it exists) has been overlooked from comparative point of view, as in most of the cases one has to rely solely on the works available in translation.

Translation Studies

The translation studies are inseparable from comparative studies. Gokak (1964) had suggested translating the devotional lyrics of great poets in India. Dev (1989), Mohan (1989) and Nemade (1989) have obliquely suggested to bring the Bhakti movement under comparative literary studies. Now devotional lyrics of Narsi Mehta (Gujarati), Tukaram (Marathi) and Tulsi Das (Hindi), for example, are available in English translation. *Vachana* poetry in Kannada, also available in translation, has been compared with metaphysical poetry (Huleppanavarmath (1996)) and Shaivaite poets have been compared to T.S. Eliot (Thirunavukkarasu (1993)).

According to Das (2000), one can make a comparative study of the influence of the Bhakti movement in Maharashtra on various regional literatures of India. In the biography of Kannada saint-poet Kanakdas, Dr. Basavaraj Naikar suggests, "There is ample scope for researchers to study themes, imagery and technique with those of other poets like Vemana, Dnyandev, Namdev, Guru Nanakdev, Tulsidasji, Surdasji, Mahatma Kabir, Metaphysical poets like John Donne, George Herbert, St. Teresa and St. Augustine from comparative point of view fruitfully and arrive at some universal patterns of religious and mystic literature" (as cited by Kullur, 2005: 114).

Earlier Focus of Translation Studies

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The main thrust of a number of translation studies pursued earlier seems to be on highlighting the genre/text/language specific problems of literary translation.

A researcher needs to think on the lines of a study like ‘Translation of Jokes: Problems of Specialized Translations’ (1996) by M. Radhika and Udaya Narayana Singh.

Studies in problems of translating non-literary texts like information brochures, user manuals, advertisements, etc., could help the students of CL to earn their livelihood. Just like studying different editions of a text, it would not be a bad idea to study the translated versions of a text in different languages or in a language, for example, translations of *Animal Farm* in Marathi.

Books on Marathi prosody, style, diction, etc. have so far not been translated (Devy, 1993: 133). The same is true of such books in other Indian languages. Books on criticism available in Indian languages need to be translated in English.

Instead of translating only the classical works in regional languages preference needs be given to translation of folk literature. There is also a considerable scope to translate *powadas* (ballads) and *lavanis* in Marathi.

One of the aims of teaching English in India stated by Krishnaswamy and Krishnaswamy (2006) is ‘the *ideology-driven identity projection* (translating and projecting India so that English becomes a ‘window on India’)’ (p.180). This underscores the direction of ‘Translation Studies’ in the 21st century India.

In the past, the academicians used to ask the researchers to focus their studies on the texts in English language. The situation has changed slowly. Singh (2000) is of the opinion that to make Indian comparative literary studies more meaningful, it is necessary to encourage Indian scholarship to attempt comparative literary studies of the Indian texts in their source language version without waiting for or taking recourse to their translation. Some of the Indian universities have taken initiatives to materialize it.

Though there may be many examples of this kind, the next two instances could suffice this. For her Ph.D., Bhaduri (2007) has studied ‘The Stream of Consciousness Fiction in India: A Comparative Study of Selected Novels in English, Hindi and Bangla’ (University of Pune). Bhambar (2009) has studied a Marathi novel *Bardana*, which in not available in English translation, for his doctoral thesis in English entitled ‘Spiritual Quest in selected representative novels about East and West: A comparative study’ (Shivaji University).

New Pastures in Comparative Studies

According to Mohan (1989: 88), the study of literature and the other arts – literature and music or literature and painting comes under the umbrella of ‘comparative literature’.

It is generally found that a number of studies in CL concentrate mostly on literature in print. However, the study of relationship between literature and other arts is taught only Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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in the universities like Jadhavpur and Delhi. For example, a paper entitled *Literature and the Visual Arts in Europe* has been introduced by Delhi University for M.A semester III. This area has been least explored for research degrees in Indian universities. There is enough scope for topics like 'A study of depiction of myths in Indian folk tales, paintings and carvings' and 'Impact of Goan music on Marathi Literature and Hindi films'.

Interdisciplinary Nature is Ignored

One of the cardinal feature of CL is its interdisciplinary nature, but it is neglected (Patil, 2007:19). There are no serious attempts of interdisciplinary research in CL in Indian universities other than in universities like Jadhavpur, Delhi and Hyderabad, to name a few.

Research in 'literature and film' is yet to get due recognition in the Indian universities (with few exceptions like above-mentioned universities). This relationship can be studied from different angles. There is need to study literary works in Indian languages and their adaptations from comparative perspective. For example, film adaptations of works of Mahasweta Devi and Amrita Pritam. There is no dearth of topics in Film Studies. Some of the topics are - Influence of British literature on Indian Films: A study of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and *Premgrantha*, Images of *Othello* reflected in Hindi Films - *Shartha*, *Hamraj* and *Omkara*, Image of a teacher in Marathi and Hindi films (e.g. *Pinjara* and *Aastha*), *Dheerodatta Nayaka* (a concept of ancient Indian literary criticism) in the Indian films, The evolution of the theme of rebirth in Hindi films from *Madhumati* to *Om Shanti Om*, Heroines in Shakespeare's plays and in Raj Kapoor's films, and The use of circus motif in *Circus* (Charlie Chaplin), *Mera Naam Joker* (Raj Kapoor) and *Appu Raja* (Kamal Haasan).

Popular culture, another fascinating ground for *Comparative Studies* (CS), has yet to become popular with the researchers. It opens a whole gamut of new hybrid studies. Some of the possible topics of research in this area have been listed below.

- i) A critical study of allusions in Ramanand Sagar's TV serial *Ramayana*
- ii) The image of mother-in-law projected through TV serials in Hindi and Marathi
- iii) A comparison of detective novels, films and TV serials in Indian languages
- iv) Influence of Western science fiction on this genre in Indian languages
- v) Impact of English romantic poets on children's songs in Marathi
- vi) A study of contribution of children's magazines to the literature in Indian languages
- vii) Influence of Diwali Special issues in Marathi on other Indian languages
- viii) A study of some recent trends in film reviews in English and Indian languages
- ix) A study of cinematic versions of the theatrical text of Marathi play *All the Best*
- x) A critical study of animated films for children like *Hanuman* and *Bal Ganesha*
- xi) A cultural study of wedding songs in literatures in Indian languages and films
- xii) The rise and development of 'Indian Writing in English', 'Bollywood' and 'Indian Cricket': A study of parallels

A literary text undergoes transformation from one form/genre to another. Some of the **areas of transformation studies** have been suggested here. Soon such tripartite studies will be the next trend in CL.

- a) Treatment of the theme of partition in fiction (*Train to Pakistan*), film (*Pinjar*) and TV serial (*Tamas*)
- b) A study of variation in a literary work from page to stage with reference to *Pygmalion* (English text), *Manpasand* (Hindi film) and *Ti Phularani* (Marathi play).
- c) Echoes of an English play into a Marathi play and its reverberations back into English: A study of generic variations (with reference to *King Lear*, *Natasamrat* & *The Last Scene*)

Scant Attention to Semiotics and Stylistics

There is considerable research in the areas of comparative linguistics and phonetics. It seems that in CS scant attention is paid towards semiotics and stylistics. Though Mohan (1989) has obliquely suggested that the codification of visual images in Indian art films can be a topic for comparative studies, semiotics has not yet got rooted in India. The stylistic and pragmatic approaches have been applied to some of the works in Indian literature in English and in English translation.

In what could be called as a striking example of interdisciplinary research, Asturkar (2008) has worked on 'Stylistic study of Music with reference to 'Etawah' gharana (sitar)' for a minor research project in English submitted to the University of Pune. It is high time that the literature in the Indian languages be compared by applying the principles of stylistics. Besides, the stylistic study of the titles of research papers in CL can become a good topic of a seminar paper. The application of concepts like speech acts, speech situations, turn-taking and implicatures could be extended further not only to comparative study of literary works in Indian languages but also to folk literature. For instance, turn-taking in folk plays like *Sangya-Balya* (Kannada) and *Kalu-Balu* (Marathi) can be studied effectively.

The researchers could also think of preparing a **glossary of 'Key Concepts in Comparative and Translation Studies'**. It would be good to prepare a visual glossary of allusions and myths in Indian literature. The bilingual dictionaries can also be compared from their utility perspective to the translators. Such works, in the form of major projects, would be a noteworthy contribution to the discipline of CL in India.

To Sum Up

It would be wrong to judge the developments in CL in India with the help of the happenings in the handful of elite universities like Jadhavpur, Delhi and Hyderabad, to name a few. The true scenario of the discipline is reflected in the teaching and research in many Indian universities which do not have separate departments and expertise in CL. If the research in CL is to be disciplined, the university like Jadhavpur needs to use its

hegemonic position to guide the research activities in ‘other’ Indian universities. Similarly, the experts in the field of CL can play a crucial role in this regard.

The Indian universities also need to function on the lines of the Research and Development section of the MNCs. The prospects of research in CL in India rests on two other aspects – first, availability of a sound bibliography of CS in English and Indian languages (Devy (1993) and Patil (2007) have already emphasized such need) and second, introduction of courses in CL (along with mention of ‘Job opportunities’ in the syllabus documents) in more and more Indian universities at UG, PG and post-PG levels.

Finally, it would be asserted that the topics suggested here are only illustrative and all topics may not be worth for research degrees, but some of these could be explored for minor research projects.

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