



CONFLUENCE

HISTORICO-COMPARATIVE
AND
OTHER LITERARY STUDIES

ABHAI MAURYA

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*TO MY TEACHERS — BOTH INDIAN AND FOREIGN,
FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL*

Introduction

Indians have an ancient dictum "Vasudhaiv Kutumbhkom" — the whole earth is one family. We are sure that such sentiments must have been expressed at one time or the other in the folklore of other peoples as well. In any case, it is widely accepted that human beings, no matter which parts of the earth they inhabit, are one in basic human ethos and sensibilities: hopes and aspirations, feelings of ecstasy and agony, joy and sorrow, love and hate, good and evil, sincerity and perfidy, notions of justice and injustice, right or wrong, fair and unfair and so on. However, there are bound to be some differences of degree and manner of expression and forms of manifestation of these human traits and sensibilities, which, of course, stem from the national specificity mainly related to the realm of superstructure of different countries and nations. Nevertheless, these individual and exclusive characteristics are more frequently discernible in the form of expression rather than in the content of various phenomena. All this notwithstanding, in the history of mankind the factors that caused great divides have been more frequently overaccentuated and overplayed to such an extent that the gaps between different peoples often seem unbridgeable. National exclusiveness and specificity, more often than not, got transformed into national arrogance, be that of small or big peoples, national superiority complexes, chauvinism and in its extreme form into fascism with disastrous consequences for humankind.

It is, therefore, high time that the feelings of human oneness are articulated, accentuated, highlighted and projected more emphatically than has been done hitherto.

On the one hand, our present book is a modest endeavour precisely in the direction of bringing human oneness into a sharper focus through the study of literature. On the other, it has also been our endeavour to identify the ways in which this universality of man's essential traits and sensibilities gets reflected in an almost identical manner in different literatures. To put it differently, our studies reveal that, firstly, the literatures of different peoples are

amazingly faithful mirrors of the life of the respective peoples at the different stages of their historical development. Secondly, the process of mirroring the life in different literatures seems to take place in an astonishingly identical manner so far as the basic parameters and dimensions of literary evolution are concerned. In other words, in most literatures the sequence of evolution of trends, genre range, narrative forms, artistic techniques and aesthetic sensibilities charts its course through almost identical meanderings, notwithstanding some specific national variations as well as some significant time lags and gaps. Precisely, the occurrence and prevalence of such phenomena confirm that the identical phenomena, i.e. the literary similarities in various national literatures take place not in a cyclic manner, but on the pattern of a spiral. This vital distinction establishes that different literatures are not and cannot be the exact replicas of each other and they do not follow exactly the same cyclical track of development again and again. In other words, various literatures in their evolutionary process either ascend or descend forming their own spool of spiral which is determined by their national specificity. But the manner in which this evolutionary spiral builds up is universal which is what convincingly establishes the points and areas of convergence or confluence of different literatures of the world. And to bring these points of convergence and areas of confluence into a definite focus has been our main endeavour in this work.

However, we would like to clarify that our efforts have been concentrated on two planes: firstly to trace and establish in general terms the related phenomena of human oneness as well as literary universality and, secondly, to discuss some of the methods of unraveling, revealing, analysing and establishing this oneness of literatures through concrete studies of various literary problems and issues. Hence our work could be considered as one of the first steps on a long and meandering path leading to the emergence and crystallisation of the concept of world literature on a more distinct plane through concrete historico-comparative literary studies to be undertaken in days to come.

The structural conception of our work has led us to divide it into two parts. The first part incorporates chapters on the genesis and historical development of the concept of world literature, evolution and concretisation of the method of historico-comparative study of literature in the East European School and the content and scope of

this method in literary studies. In the fourth chapter we discuss some of the methodological approaches that could be applied to the study of a problem like the genesis of realism in Hindi and Russian literatures. This essay is more indicative of a possibly correct method of undertaking a comparative study of literature rather than being exhaustive study of the problem under reference. The fifth chapter deals with the problem of concrete forms and media in which and through which interliterary contacts get manifested. The role, function and place of translation has been discussed in this chapter from some unconventional angles.

We have some plausible reasons to believe that the comparative studies being undertaken in the field of literature, particularly in a country like India, in most cases suffer from a reductive empirism. In their studies scholars frequently get bogged down in eclectically finding similarities and dissimilarities in the works of two writers or literatures and that too on an extremely superficial plane. Apart from this in most cases the researchers are unable to break free from the spell which the theory of "influences" has cast in the field of comparative study of literature. More often than not, scholars tend to empirically establish the influence of this or that writer on the counterpart under study in a most superficial manner. Such an approach in our view could hardly contribute to the better appreciation and assessment of literary phenomena in the context of interliterary mutuality.

It is in this background that we think that these essays have a potential of generating serious discussions and rethinking about the appropriate approaches which should be applied in the comparative study of literature.

Another important feature of our work and essays incorporated therein could be in the fact that it is, perhaps, for the first time that an effort has been made to acquaint our literary scholars with the East European literary approaches and schools, in particular with the Russian literary traditions and methodology. In the first issue of "Indian Journal of Russian Language, Literature and Culture" (Vol. I, No. 1, February, 1984) the following was specifically underlined: "It is now appropriately being realised that over-dependence on sources available in the English language alone (mainly Western) leads to lopsidedness in the approach and understanding of Indian scholars in respect of their subjects of study. More importantly, the experience of Western scholars, particularly in the subjects of

humanities, has little or no relevance to Indian reality because of the yawning gulf between our socio-political and historical traditions. Depending, therefore, solely on Western experience is neither correct nor desirable. This is not to suggest that we should close our doors altogether on Western intellectual works. On the contrary, what we venture to suggest is that we should endeavour to open at least a 'fortochka' (a small window) into the vast work being done by Soviet philologists, which has, by and large, remained outside the reach of Indian counterparts owing to the language barrier. By doing so we shall be able to have the benefit of different 'worlds' in order to work out our own independent and indigenous viewpoints, which should be of utmost importance to us."

Our present book in a way is a modest first step towards the opening up of this valuable channel of research sources available in Russian language which has been inaccessible to Indian scholars hitherto owing to the language barrier. We have consciously strived to offer an insight into the work done by the literary theorists, and critics and scholars in the East European countries and in particular in the Soviet Union through the medium of Russian language. A note of caution in this context becomes imperative lest we should be misunderstood. The extensive use of Russian literary sources in our essays should not imply that it is an attempt at totally precluding Western sources. We intend to accomplish our present venture in three stages: firstly, acquainting the Indian scholarship with the methodology, approaches, schools of thought etc. which are prevalent in the Russian school of literary theory, history and criticism. This endeavour, of course, is undertaken by refracting the Russian interpretations and conceptual formulations through the prism of our own perceptions and theoretical positions. At the second stage we intend to extensively counterpose the Western and the East European schools with a view to arrive at the third stage, i.e., working out of our own indigenous theoretical positions. Needless to say that even at the first stages the Indian element would be constantly present. But at the third stage an intensive scrutiny of the first two schools, i.e. East European and Western positions will be undertaken in the background of existing Indian standpoints. Out of this extensive and intensive scholarly churning we are confident that the Indian school will have the benefit of getting consolidated in terms of essential theoretical fundamentals and achieving of more clarity on numerous vexed issues of theory, history and criticism of literature.

Our present book, of course, does not claim to be an exhaustive work embodying most issues pertaining to the major branches of theory and practice of literature. It is more of a symptomatic endeavour, though it, perhaps, is the first ever venture of its kind in Indian conditions. But it certainly does give enough indication about the potential and immense scope that the study of literary sources available in Russian language offer for the enormous enrichment of the Indian literary scholarship.

The book, however, encompasses a fairly wide spectrum of literary problems, topics and problems. Apart from the problems of the theory of comparative study of literature dealt in the first part of the book the second part covers a wide range of broad fields as well as studies of some concrete problems of interdisciplinary nature. The second part consists of studies on methodology of literary analysis. In this section we discuss the thorny issue of theory and practice of socialist realism. This problem has been discussed against the background of Georg Lukács's theoretical-critical evaluation of Maxim Gorky and A. Solzhenitsyn, both of whom, according to Lukács, made a tangible contribution to the socialist realist school in Soviet literature. Our essay discusses both the strong (Gorky) and weak (Solzhenitsyn) points in the Lukácsian premises and strives to place the aesthetic principles of socialist realism in a proper perspective. The second article deals with the most complicated question, i.e., correlation of form and content in socialist realism through the analysis of the historical tussle that had gone on for a few decades between the "formalist" and "the vulgar sociologist" schools in the Soviet literatures in 1920's and 1930's. The third article in this part attempts at discussing some concrete techniques of literary analysis and in particular as to how the faculty of literary analysis could be inculcated in the young scholars at the initial stage of research. The last essay explores the potentials of Russian language as an additional channel of research sources. The essay is based on some very specific material, facts and observations of the author.

Finally, we would like to emphasise that each article included in this book is an independent study. Hence, unlike a monograph, which usually is an uninterrupted work on a single subject or theme, the book might seem hazardous if studied at a stretch. It is, therefore, recommended that essays should be studied in some specific contexts of literary problems being analysed. Because of the independent nature of each essay some degree of repetition has proved

unavoidable. Some of the facts, arguments and quotations had to be used more than once, of course, with a view to drive home different points that cropped up recurrently in more than one context.

We are convinced that this book could be very meaningfully perused by the students and scholars of comparative study of literature, with particular reference to the areas of folklore, methodology of literary analysis and criticism, theory of literary translation as well as by the scholars of disciplines like history, sociology and socio-political thought.

We are conscious of possible flaws that might be present in this work. But, we are confident, that the enlightened opinions, observations and critical comments of the readers will help us in surmounting some of the draw backs in our future ventures that we intend to undertake after this initial step, which constitutes the first stage in a proposed three-part research endeavour.

This work has materialised thanks to the help and advice rendered by friends and colleagues at various stages. we would like to express our deep gratitude to Prof. R.M. Bakaya, Prof. Prem Singh, Ms Neena Rao and Mr Ahmer Nadeem Anwar for reading portions of the book in manuscript form. Their advice, suggestions and editorial acumen has been of immense help to us in the creation of this work. We must thank Prof. Sisir Das, Prof. C.N. Chakravorti, and Prof. K.S. Dhingra for their sustained encouragement.

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PART I

*MEETING OF MINDS AND
CONFLUENCE OF LITERATURES*

EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF WORLD LITERATURE

There is ample evidence to show the identicalness of the mode of life of primitive men. However, subsequent developments led to gradual differentiations with the formation of different peoples and races. This process was accompanied by the fragmentation and parcelling of the human population into national, local and narrow territorial segments. More often than not, different strata of this population in the world became increasingly isolated and insulated within the limits of national boundaries and man-made barriers. In political terms, this process frequently manifested itself in parochialism, narrow nationalism, chauvinism and in some cases, even fascism.

The same fate befell the realms of art, culture and literature. Until around the end of the 18th century, it was fragmentation, isolationism or "seclusion" that remained dominant in the fields of art and literature. The turning point, in our view, was the French Revolution of 1789 after which "art entered into a new phase of its development".¹

However, in this context it would be pertinent to refer to an interesting parallel which P.N. Berkov has drawn between notions like "history of mankind" and "world history", on the one hand, and "history of literature" and "history of world literature", on the other. Berkov observes that till 1857-58, Karl Marx in his writings had not used the term "world history". On the basis of an analysis of the early writings of Marx, Berkov has been able to conclude that the concept of "history of mankind" is wider than the notion of the "world history". "History of mankind" began with the very moment of the transformation of "manlike creatures into people", whereas "world history", writes Marx, "has not always been in existence; history as world history is the result. . .".² But here, naturally, arises a question: "result" of which processes? The answer to this question, according to Berkov, is that it is the result of the long process of development:

"And so, 'world history' is not a permanent entity but the 'result' of the entire foregoing development; it is a phase in 'the history of mankind'."³

Here, then, arises the question as to at what stage did the "world history" come into being? Again, basing his observations on Marx's writings, Berkov states that "world history" has its beginning in the rise of the "world market", which, in turn, came into existence by the 16th century: "World trade and world market in the 16th century mark the beginning of the new history of capital."⁴ Elsewhere, Marx writes: "The world market gave rise to a colossal development of trade, sea voyages, and means of surface communication."⁵

However, according to Marx "the world market" begins to come into full play only around 1825 and onwards, i.e., with the development of "machines", which "was an inevitable outcome of the demands of the market. Beginning with 1825, the invention and deployment of machines has been only a result of the war between industrialists and workers."⁶ But, according to Marx, this was true only of England. Other European nations were forced to introduce machines by the British competition in both the home and world markets.

It is interesting that Goethe used the expression "world literature" (*weltliteratur*) in 1827. In fact, during the years 1815-1847 and later, according to Engels, "the colossal growth of means of communication — ocean-going steamers, railways, electric telegraph, Suez Canal etc. — had for the first time created a real world market."⁷ Thus, the intensification of the process of emergence of "world history", which had been facilitated by the appearance of the world market, was bound to cause turmoil in the realms of culture, art, and, in particular, literature. In political terms, the French Revolution of 1789 had also given tremendous jolts to the hitherto predominant state of seclusion and stagnation of art and literature within narrow national boundaries which until then had been buttressed by the monolithic feudal state. By now, with the advantage of hindsight, it can be said, that the feudal monarchies did not and could not expose their subjects to any gust of fresh air blowing from an "alien" direction or realm.

The revolution of 1789, as observed above, unleashed the forces which, on the one hand, started working towards the notion of one world, one culture, one literature . . . and, on the other, played a salutary role in challenging the subjugation of nation by nation, of culture by culture, of literature by literature. . . . The slogan of

Equality, Fraternity, Liberty facilitated the projection of the oneness and equality of human beings. A high water-mark in this direction was reached when the revolution became victorious in Russia in 1917. It may, thus, be safely said that over the last two centuries or so a welcome development in a direction reverse to the one in the preceding period, has been actively under way. Different cultures and literatures of the world have been coming closer together with every passing day. This phenomenon, again, certainly is the manifestation of the closer contact that the peoples of the world have been experiencing. As was observed above, the developments in the field of technology, e.g., transport, means of communication, etc., led to a swift development of international literary contacts, active exchange of literary contexts and views. This process got a further impetus thanks to the qualitatively new developments in socio-political and philosophical thought, particularly the materialist and dialectical materialist conception of history, economics and society, etc. The process of demolition of national barriers was rather far and wide, and provided ample substance to the statements of Marx and Engels in this regard: "National onesidedness, narrowness, is becoming more and more impossible with every passing day and from amongst the multitude of national and local literatures, is emerging one world literature."

This amply substantiates the point that the notion of "the history of literature" is wider than "the history of world literature" as the latter is only a "result" which began to be actively manifested only at a particular stage, i.e., from early 19th century onwards. "The history of world literature", therefore, is intimately linked with the emergence of the "world history" of mankind: "World literature has not existed since time immemorial. World literature is the result of the new stage of world history which begins with the appearance of the world market, i.e. from 16th century."⁸ But world literature started exercising the minds of creative writers, poets, scholars and theoreticians in an extensive manner around the time when Goethe used the term "world literature" for the first time, in 1827.

Thus, with the accelerated and intensive process of the shrinking of the globe, as it is said figuratively, the closeness or even oneness of the peoples of the world in the most essential human traits was brought into very sharp focus. People began to realise, sometimes with a deep sense of joy, sometimes with utter surprise and at other times even with some degree of bewilderment that they are extremely

close to each other in basic human values: in their hopes and aspirations, their understanding of the notions of good and evil, love and hatred, sincerity and treachery, agony and ecstasy, and so on, albeit temporal and spatial gulfs still separate them.

This is not to suggest that the realisation of this unity, affinity and oneness of mankind is a recent phenomenon. In ancient Indian writings we come across the famous dictum: *vasudhaiv kutumbhakam* (the whole world is one family). It is quite possible that similar sentiments had found their echo in the ancient literatures of other peoples as well. But, it is only in modern times that this unique feeling of human oneness got a tremendous impetus. Literature being, by and large, a mirror of the social scenario, did not remain unaffected by this growing realisation of human unity.

As we have observed above, Goethe, developing the views of his teacher Herder Johann Gottfried, advanced the slogan of a "common world literature", which, according to him, would be based on the free spiritual and trade exchanges between different peoples and would be able to surmount the constraints of narrow national boundaries by incorporating into its main body all those valuable works and their different elements: themes, ideas, motifs, characters, images, etc., which have been created by various peoples of the world over the different stages of their historical development: "National literature does not mean much," said Goethe. "Now we are entering into an epoch of world literature and each one should now contribute towards accelerating the pace of emergence of such an epoch." Further, Goethe said: "It is good that thanks to the close contacts between French, English and German peoples, we have to supplement each other. From this, world literature, which is getting crystallised more and more clearly, stands to gain tremendously."

However, here it should be underlined that Goethe's words "national literatures do not mean much" should be understood in a figurative sense, as he used them with a view to hyperbolise the need for developing world literature. Even Marx and Engels in their above cited observation (1848) had mentioned that it is "*from amongst*" and not "*in the place of*" national literatures, that the "world literature" is getting born. Thus, in no case does the emergence of world literature lead to the abolition of national literatures. On the contrary, their global character as well as their individual specificity come into sharp focus with the rise of world literature.

An extremely significant element in Goethe's contribution to the