

Comparative Literature and Globalization with Special Reference to the Future of Languages

There is a general perception that Comparative literature because of its international contextualization is global in structure. This perception was further congealed by Tagore's term 'Viswa Sahitya' or Goethe's Weltliteratur' and CL became a discipline of studying literature by embracing all the literatures of the world.

This notion of Viswa Sahitya helps the discipline of CL to recognize both the limits and possibilities of its field of inquiry. Both Goethe and Tagore keeping this limit in mind demonstrated how literature acknowledges the world's unity but at the same time they don't forget to mention about the irreducible variety of literature which impels us to make choices for study with respect to the languages and literary texts in a multilingual and multicultural country like India or in other places of the world.

There is no doubt that with the globalization of the world economy, a true world literature, which is to say a global literature is created. But with the help of which texts and in which language? The global culture, in the last century, before consumerism and information technology was inaugurated by translation and if we take India as the reference point, all these were and are being done in English, the multi-national language of the world.

More serious than this is that English, the language of the global enterprise, is affecting our use of language and having an impact on our socio-cultural thinking.

Even if we think against all hopes that as the lightning struck Tagore about 100 years ago in the form of a noble prize similarly it will happen to a M.T.Vasudevan Nair or a Sunil Gangopadhyay or a Kunwar Narain, it is not likely to happen as it is some what likelier to happen to a Vikram Seth or a Amitabh Ghosh as it happened to a Naipaul, the writer of Indian origin particularly of the use of the 'master' language by them and the sense of disinterestedness shown by the Euro centric world readership in the English translation of Indian literature and this can be corroborated by the fact that of all the translations, about 10 titles per year, published by Penguin India so far, the parent imprint, Penguin London, picks up for international distribution barely any copies of hardly any titles.

Prof. U.R. Ananthamurthy once spoke of this dismal situation: 'We in India would read the novels of Saul Bellow or Michiel Tournier or William Golding as pieces of literature, but his Samskara or any other Indian novel, if read at all, those would be read only as pieces of sociological or anthropological study of the Indian society.'

In speaking of literary and cultural studies globalization has indeed brought about some new phenomena, such as post-colonial and diasporic writing, ethnic problems, literary and cultural identity construction, internet culture and literature etc. which are theorized and analyzed and debated but as

comparatists involved in such a debate, we are much more concerned about the possible consequences that globalization might well cause to our cultural and intellectual life, and what strategy we shall adopt to ward off such a severe challenge.

Or more specifically we are most concerned about where our discipline is going in such an age of globalization in which different cultures are becoming more and more homogenized with some individual culture even losing its national identity and aesthetic characteristics.

According to the UNESCO 2009 Atlas of the world's languages in Danger of Disappearing, India tops the list of countries where languages are precariously balanced between neglect and extinction.

We have 196 endangered languages, including 84 that are 'unsafe', 62 that are definitely endangered, 35 officially endangered and 9 extinct languages. But the reason of the loss of our diverse linguistic heritage is not globalization to that extent as it is more due to our flawed language policy. It is the National Knowledge Commission which wants English to be promoted in all possible ways at the cost of Indian bhashas to create a knowledge society.

It says: The recommendations broadly deal with the modalities of introducing English in schools from Class I, teacher training, language pedagogy and resource support for language teaching and learning so that India could emerge as one of the leading knowledge societies. In other

words NKC asserts that knowledge could be developed and gathered only in English and the vast reservoir of knowledge available in bhashas are of no consequence. On top of it our diverse linguistic heritage is loosing its ground because of the neglect that has beset all those tongues not included in the eight schedule of the Constitution.

It is not globalization but globality, which is to be properly discussed and understood. Globality means, how to tackle globalization in your own terms.

(1) How to maintain our cultural diversity.

(2) If diversity is to be maintained then globalization is to be comprehended very properly because both local and global are important.

(3) Theories of globalization have moved from expressions of the process as “cultural imperialism” or neo-imperialism to analyses of the ‘hybridization’, and interrelationship of global societies, the ‘compression of the world and the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole’. (Robetsm 1992:8).

(4) It is said that if you talk of identity you are accepting difference between the self and the other. Europe is very much afraid of the other. The ‘other’ in the West is an inalienable entity external to one self is both a source of terror and an object of desire. Sartre’s famous statement ‘Hell is the other’ carries a strong echo of Hegel, who always defines one’s identity as identity against the other either to

be appropriated or to be destroyed. But the Western mind knows well that if he succeeds in completely subjugating the 'other' the identity of his own self becomes dubious. He wants to become whole by destroying the other but without the other, he becomes nothing.

In India the self is self-referential and hence there is no problem with the other. Self and the other can co-exist and has co-existed all through the ages. Self is co-dependent upon the other as explained by the dvaita philosophers like Madva or Nanak. and this to be brought into the picture for understanding the world's unity and also the wonderful variety in the comparative literature studies.

Globalization is related with the notion of progress and development. Globalization brings money. Without it no worthwhile development can occur. But the terms and conditions for generation of money and good living are laid down by the global market.

It would appear that this global market in the name of development provides us the means

(1) to destroy our resources rapidly and tragically our under-development furnishes us the reasons, the excuses, and the compulsions to do so and in the process we face unmitigated disaster from both directions poverty from below and development from above and

(2) to usurp local spaces which are spaces of taste, fragrance and sensuousness and ultimately local culture, value, significance and belief.

Since the global market is a giant market it has to over-ride the specificities and take recourse to generalities. It is a totalizing market.

The emergence and dominance of proscenium theatre in India could illustrate this point in a telling manner. Once the proscenium theatre was adopted by us, many forms of theatrical presentation, expressions complexities, to be watched from close quarters, were pushed out of the so-called urban theatre out of its theatre-space.

Similarly many forms of performing arts would go out of popular appeal since they cannot be brought successfully on the small screen which has emerged as the most powerful instrument of the global market.

It creates cultural destruction like introducing, green hyacinth in a pond – first it takes over and kills other water dependent plants – then it spread until it covers the entire surface of the pond and then it sucks up oxygen from the water until the fish dies. If cultural destruction is not checked it may cause the political self rule to be compromised by out side forces, the international power brokers.

(3) The global economic system is quite evidently not sustainable and inequitable and does not allow alternate approaches to life. All resistance is liquidated or coopted.

(4) The greed-based economic development leads to impoverishment and underdevelopment of others resulting in the degradation of *Prakriti*, environment and *nari*, the honour of women. The pollution of environment because of greed based economy is the direct result of our material and physical lust and insatiable desires leading primarily to the exploitation of women.

The irony is that global market on one side usurps local culture but without local it cannot function and flourish.

The basis for consumer culture is advertisement but without using the language of the local people, their ethos of the family life, religion and behaviour you can't sell the product.

The TV serials about family life following the traditional social norms and the use of mythologies even by start TV indicate that global cannot survive without local. The global can reach us only being local. The global has to locate itself; has to have a locus but the local language of advertisement is turning to be abbreviated and codified: *annya meri khelai aari* or *bole toe kurkure* and this is affecting the proper usage of language.

With reference to literature in this age of globality, it can be said that globalization is affecting the creativity of the writer because his value is now determined not by his

aesthetic value but by his market value and as a result writers like Kamal Kumar Majumdar, and poets like Naresh Mehta are completely marginalized.

The mixing of two different language codes of the global market in India is now used extensively – Hindi-English or Bengali-English and like that. And not only the domination of English has become quite obvious and the other languages are being appropriated.

It is affecting our use of language and has an impact on our socio-cultural thinking.

Now the question is do our languages have the capacity to be the languages of internet, e-mail and information technology.

However and there is no doubt that global market cannot develop itself as a monolith single production centre – it has to take help of the local culture, local business and the main languages of the country.

James Murdock, Son of Rupert Murdock, the media magnet, made a startling statement a few years ago that English cannot be the only language of the internet.

To make one's presence felt in the world market the use of Mandarin, Spanish, English, and Hindi will become essential. By 2006, 835 million people will use Mandarin in inter net, 470m English, 330m Spanish and 300m Hindi. Cultural colonialism has now understood that the spread of

western market in the non-western world will loosen the domination of English. I do not know if it was proved true. I only know lots and lots of Indians are using Hindi in the internet.

But the big question is will it be our languages as created by us or our languages as created by the forces of global market.

Will our languages, culture be able to deal with globalization.

One can give the reason that when we could resist colonialism why not we could resist this onslaught.

Raja Ram Mohan Ray had a double resistance – from inside as well as from outside.

Because of inside resistance he went to Vedas and Upanishads and founded Brahma Samaj and also published a newspaper in Persian language, which was the result of his outside resistance against colonialism. Tagore had a similar resistance from outside as well as from inside which resulted in his effort of assimilating the East with the West.

Sushobhan Sarkar on the contrary rejected the synthesis between the East and the West and established his theory that the East and the West are two opposite categories to be interpenetrated for creating a new structure and that will help to save our languages and culture.

But today we are not feeling threatened. The general pattern of thinking is that add 'if' and 'but' and allow America to enter.

The measuring rod of our talent is the publication of our creative literature in English translation by the Penguin India.

What to talk of literature!

Will our Newspapers remain newspapers at all or not because newspapers are now run by managers, who know how to make profit and not by editors.

Now in this situation of a tension between the acceptance of the local for the benefit of the market and cooption of the local or homogenization of everything local to create a monolith market the question of identify, protection of local culture and languages has become very important.

We are said to be increasingly becoming residents of a global village. Travel, communication, information are already creating a global neighbourhood. But the terms and conditions for staying in this village are determined by the global players and when they tried to dictate these terms in WTO meetings at Rancun, Hongkog and Geneva India had to take the lead to strongly oppose it.

We must guard against the homogenizing nature of all this globalization which sidelines and trivializes the many

cultures, choking channels of wisdom and insights, denying us the many perspectives and view points.

There is no doubt that without checking greed based economic development which leads to impoverishment and under development of others resulting in the degradation of Prakriti and Nari, no amount of environmental friendly actions will ensure a future for the family of man.

Let me refer to the Prince of Kapilvastu.

Kapilvastu was a small regional capital.

A prince abandoned the royal pleasures and comforts to search for answers to some of the ultimate human issues about destiny, purpose, suffering and mortality.

He attained “Sambodhi” under a tree.

The wisdom he achieved and later articulated for others was deeply immersed in certain ambivalence about the existence of God and was aimed at helping attain “Nirvana”, liberation into nothingness.

“The awakened one” as he was since then called, asked simply: ‘Be a lamp to yourself’.

He insisted “all truths should be used to cross over; they should not be held on to, once you have arrived”.

The locale was regional; the message was transmitted in the local dialect. The recipients were local. How, this utterly local phenomenon grew into an almost global one running across several centuries now is one of the major miracles of human history.

Local cultures may be local in root and spread but they think and act globally

The local persists in the global. The global cannot but be pluralistic and the plural can only be reached through the local.

The global can reach us only being local. The global has to locate it; has to have a locus.

Hence one has to expose the western mode of development with totalizing tendencies and go also for an alternative mode of development which will allow for the rhythm and movements of human life to be in accordance with nature.

The writers are generally divided into two groups in their search for an answer.

1) On one side, the loud slogan is protect, protect yourself, we are finished – This kind of a defensive slogan is heard and this type of a voice is creating some kind of a conservatism in our thinking and writing.

When the Empire came in the sub continent the Bengal renaissance took place leading us to new thinking, new

approach to life and now with globalization conservatism is spreading its wings.

This is the primary reason for the demand for swadeshi by a section of people. This demand for swadeshi is definitely different from the demand for swadeshi by Mahatma Gandhi who used it as a handle to fight the colonial domination.

Now on the contrary with our demand for swadeshi we are raising some kind of an imaginary nationalism and hence talking more and more as how to save creative literature from the onslaught of global market. The spurt of showing traditional domestic lives where a woman is shown as a stereotype Indian women or showing of mythological serial is the result of this kind of conservatism. This is creating more of a problem for the inside structure of literature.

Why our debate is taking such a defensive turn. Is there anything universal – logos which we are ignoring and so the conservatives are trying to control the literary world.

2) On the other side, the second group says that globalization can't be stopped – that is the key to progress.

It has brought changes in our languages – mixing of language codes have entered in our speech in a big way which is breaking all kind of language hierarchy Acceptability and open mindedness have increased.

The effect of globalization is creating a new narrative – global grid is now acceptable.

While in the last renaissance we went back to our ancients.

Now like the metropolitan culture, we are visualizing Indian culture as a part of the global village and as a result

- 1) In comparison with global the local, in the post-modern period is getting important and becoming inclusive.
- 2) The global impact has given birth to feminism in India – a very positive sign towards the empowerment of women.

In India the woman writers accept the feminine construct as a valid construct and use the inequality to expose marriage and widowhood, unfair work practices, sexual servitude, the problems of bearing and rearing children in poverty, gender discrimination and other forms of exploitation.

- 3) It has also exposed the suppression and persecution of Dalits and the inhuman ways of using child as labour. The urge to impart education to girls has increased,

Now there is an awaking to be seen in the marginalized area of the society.

In view of these two views about globalization vis-a-vis language, literature and culture one can conclude.

- 1) The autonomy of literature is in danger. There was a time when it was said that if the writer wanted he could change the world but today the man who was in the centre of history is threatened. Technology is the sole power – the ultimate deciding factor.
- 2) The information hype is now real which is now threatening the objective reality. The information world is now turning objectivity into imagination.

What is going to happen in future is very difficult to say. However, we have tremendous resilience and this is our only hope.

If we still believe that India's civilizational enterprise has to survive this new, powerful and global onslaught there are only three ways

or perhaps three aspects of the only way :
to question and to interrogate;
to resist and to subvert.

If you don't interrogate you cannot resist, if you don't resist you cannot subvert and eventually consumed.

Resist development, which leads to the impoverishment and under development of others, which results in the degradation of environment and the displacement of people, which exposes the disparities of our country and uses violence as power.

The global economic system is quite evidently not sustainable and inequitable and does not allow alternate approaches to life.

There are four dimensions of cultural globalization as understood with reference to economic globalization (Avijit Pathak : Modernity, Globalization and Identity).

- 1) There is indeed a significant influence of the economy over culture. One can notice the glimpses of cultural globalization in any metropolitan city of India : young boys and girls wearing levi's/Nautica Jeans, using their credit cards to withdraw money from the ATM counter, consuming Mc Donald's hamburger or pizza from Pizza huts and seeing Hollywood films in the gorgeous malls – one can smell the market – its style, intoxication and packaging.
- 2) It can be argued that the two domains – economy and culture – can retain their relative autonomy. It can be seen in the production and dissemination of cultural goods – says popular films like Munna bhai lage raho, Rang de vasanti and tele serials like Valika badhu or utran - that sanctify the norms of the Hindu extended family, arranged marriage and

religious practices among those who otherwise live in a global corporate world and are extremely wealthy and mobile.

- 3) It is thought that culture is a domain having immense possibilities. It can create new modes of resistance. It can resist economic as well as cultural globalization and oppose a trend towards homogenization. This idea has led Arundhati Roy to recall Gandhiji's salt march – that way it was a direct strike at the economic underpinning of the British Empire, and to plead for yet another non-cooperation movement to resist globalization or what she regards as the American hegemony.
- 4) There is also a creative possibility of adaptability, innovation and experimentation. It is argued that there is something irreversible in the globalizing process, and there is also something good about it. It is, therefore, desirable to remain open and strive for reconciliation. It is possible to have a cultural diffusion and hybridity.

This is the time when the virtual world seems to dominate the physical world, so that minutes after a devastating earthquake in Iran, a friend can send a gratis message through the invisible web that says:

Over there a crying man is hugging and kissing his dead daughter and wife, but his daughter's face still looks calm and beautiful. The man is looking up at the sky and

shouting like an injured lion, while he is kindly holding two dead bodies in his arms. Dear friend, the earth got angry with those people, but why.

The man received about 9000 e-mail messages showing sorrow and sympathy to him in his moments of great tragedy.

This is the liberating potential of globalization, which needs to be tapped for our survival and survival well.