

Signifying Indo-Latin American Literary Contacts and World Literature

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ABSTRACT

This paper throws light on the possibilities of exploring the tremendously unutilized comparative literary ground shared between India and Latin America and that, in this light, the capacity to analyse potential transcultural literary strands is enormous. I would like to argue that the prospect of an Indo-Latin American dialogue with respect to the concept of World Literature could lead to a productive opportunity to create a signifying proximity between two cultural spaces and through a literary exchange of ideas and themes, the cultural configuration on both sides would receive an opening that should be ventured into. This prospect would entail an interaction which is based on traversing the linguistic gaps between India and Latin America. There could be numerous contact points that are thematically contextualized and also motivate the exploration of modern literature with an emphasis on human condition, as in Octavio Paz, Vallejo, Neruda and Mahapatra, Ramanujan and Ezekiel. There shall always be space to cover alternative and multilingual forms of literary texts on the two sides, which could lead on to research in finding new thematic strands in a transcultural context. A meaningful exchange of literary and cultural themes between India and Latin America would enable to render 'alternative modernities' and, in turn, question any 'singular modernity' (Jameson). The layered complexity of 'modernity', for instance, is projected in Oriyan writer, Fakir Mohan Senapati's novel, 'Six Acres and a Third'. The recognition that a comparative literary exchange between the two areas has the potential to generate new thematic strands of signification must be associated first with the need to develop meaningful comparative literary scholarship. World literature should be manifested as a multiplicity of worlds, in which India and Latin America are some of the 'worlds' playing significant roles.

Keywords: Indo-Latin American - World Literature - transcultural - linguistic gaps

This is the right philosophy: everything is a journey. What can be seen and what is hidden; what can be touched and what can only be guessed at (Saramago 227)

The end of one journey is simply the start of another. You have to see what you missed the first time, see again what you already saw ... You have to start the journey anew. Always. The traveller sets out once more. (Saramago 443)

When the explorer, Vasco da Gama, set foot in Calicut in 1497 for the search of a “sea-based route to India¹”, could one say that perhaps it was the act of a journey which would be considered more instrumental than the travellers who undertook it, for it is due to the voyage da Gama ventured on that brought the two continents evidently closer. And like him, we as individuals as communities or cultures, are invariably identified with a journey somewhere, both in the literal and metaphoric sense.

An element inevitably associated with the journey is the sense of departures and arrivals. As far as the context of a point of contact between any two geographical entities and their interaction is concerned any travellers are bound by their potential first steps, and the direction they take thereafter. What is clear is that in order for the traveller to discover anything, the steps towards the next journey from where the first point of destination ends must be set out as Saramago implies in the above quoted words.

This paper throws light on the possibilities of exploring the tremendously unutilized comparative literary ground shared between India and Latin America and that, in this light, the capacity to analyse potential transcultural literary strands is enormous. The Latin American boom and relatively recent global currency and circulation demonstrated by Indian writing in English has depicted awareness of the literary cultures of the two places. However, there are numerous literary and critical voices that remain unexplored. Could one say that the real or fictional landscapes such as Macondo of Marquez and Malgudi of R.K. Narayan have truly been assimilated by the academy or the comparative fora on either side without being stereotyped as the faces of any cultural edifice?

The ‘traveller’, the role to be assumed by readers, translators and critics and espoused by writers and publishers, must embark in newer directions to discover and learn alike.

I would also like to argue that the prospect of an Indo-Latin American dialogue with respect to the concept of World Literature could lead to a productive opportunity to create a

¹Wanser, Shane. “History - British History in Depth: Vasco Da Gama.” BBC, BBC, 17 Feb. 2011, www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/vasco_da_gama_01.shtml.

signifying proximity between two cultural spaces and through a literary exchange of ideas of themes, the cultural configuration on both sides would receive an opening that should be ventured into.

Consequently, this prospect would entail an interaction which is based on traversing the linguistic gaps between India and Latin America. Moreover, a conscious effort in the regard of a conversation from the point of view of comparative studies would contribute to the field of World Literature from a particularly oriented Indo-Latin American context. This would throw light on the current growth in world literature if more scholars and even readers in general from India and Latin America are encouraged to read, write, analyse and translate literary voices of each other's counterpart.

Understanding Linguistic Gaps

From the point of view of academic proficiency, it is significant to visit the linguistic outputs of the two areas and in order to address the issues of language gaps between India and Latin America, the field of literary studies could well reveal empty spaces which translation studies and literary criticism could resolve.

The cultural ties of India are increasingly developing with those cultures whose language and its literary expression it is familiar with. In order that India and the Latin American continent 'travel' more towards each other, the bridge of a common link language like English could be consciously used to generate interest towards each other's languages official national regional and even indigenous. Promoting and running Cultural centres and 'Casa Latinas' in the prominent as well as alternative academic circles of the two spaces would be an encouraging step towards linguistic knowledge and cultural training from the point of view of Indo-Latin American literary studies.

The Latin American and Indian academic institutions that are keenly interested to have regular exchange programs for scholars should be duly supported. This would ensure that the cultural exchange of ideas is driving towards connecting to address linguistic gaps. The cultural venues on both sides should invite artists and writers on a regular basis as well. Thus, the linguistic distances shall be travelled through a shared experience constituted by exchange of stories in various literary forms. Programmes such as the ones concentrating especially on

folklore and myths of the two geographical landmarks should establish the essential links beyond national boundaries.

Research scholars could invest in choosing topics from each other's literature from points of view such as mythological, historical and philosophical. Scholarly work shall also be appreciated regarding the potential to build or revive earlier efforts, a bridge between the traditional and modern aspects of the literary cultures of India and Latin America. The tradition of folk tales for example to highlight the oral literatures in Latin America and India could be studied in the comparative mould.²

The multiculturalism present on both sides could be traced back to the troubadour poets and in the saintly voices of Nanak, Tukaram, Dynaneshwar, Kabir, Surdas to instantiate few of the Indian literary references as well as the diverse indigenous voices such as Nezahualcoyotl from present day Mexico, Songs of Dzitbalche, the wandering 'gaucho' minstrels of Argentina and Uruguay or the Aztex songs etc.

There could be numerous contact points that are thematically contextualized and also motivate the exploration of modern literature with an emphasis on human condition, as in Octavio Paz, Vallejo, Neruda and Mahapatra, Ramanujan and Ezekiel. There shall always be space to cover alternative and multilingual forms of literary texts on the two sides, which could lead on to research in finding new thematic strands in a transcultural context.

Need for Consistency in Literary Exchange

The first readings of the literary texts of India and Latin America are akin to the traveller visiting a new place, but who knows that re-readings, much like revisits would be absolutely essential in order to justify the existential import of these literatures. It leads the explorer, the critic or the reader to discover relevant linkages and contexts.

The reasons for literary success of the two places on a global level shall be contextualized. The linguistic unification and accessibility that we find in Latin America, through its two major languages, Spanish and Portuguese is the very reason for its proliferation in the rest of the world. Similarly, considering the last two decades of a boom in literary circles,

²A.K. Ramanujan's *Folktales from India, Oral Tales from Twenty Indian Languages* and John Bierhorst's *Latin American Folktales: Stories from Hispanic and Indian Traditions* are few of the important books which could be referred to keen learners.

the increasing popularity of Indian writing could be largely attributed to the medium of English language, and its prevalence across the globe.

The realization of existing irregularities could enable one to revive the academic approach, in particular, towards the two repositories of literature. The prospective contacts between the literary and cultural references is possible with the support of academia in the direction towards accommodating multiple spaces manifested in the form of narratives, poetics texts based on domestic myths and symbols.

Collaborative projects involving research publication specially of issues based symmetrically on Indo-Latin American literary contacts could be devoted in this regard. These contacts must address spaces from the centres to the boundaries in a consistent manner. A constant interaction of new literary currents could be established once we incorporate the earlier scholarship in this regard. Research carried out should receive its due attention in such a way that these intersections could generate a periodic practice of transcultural correspondence. For example, scholarship associated with names such as Ketaki Dyson (Tagore's visits to Argentina), VibhaMaurya (Neruda's visits to India), Anthony Stanton (Octavio Paz's journey to Jaipur, India), and Susanne Klengle (Gilberto Freyre's travel to Portuguese territories as in Goa), and other scholars on both sides shall be duly communicated to the current generation of students.

Nonetheless, apart from a few other critics then these reciprocation of literary ideas, especially from the point of view of the concept of World Literature as a 'world literature space' that is built of a "set of interconnected positions, which must be thought and described in relational terms (Casanova 194), has not been able to be put forward by the Indo-Latin American literary dialogue.

There are issues other than the duly popular 'magical realism' that Indian readers would appreciate. Likewise, there are many diverse literary voices from India, particularly from regional areas which could be understood to be the ground that the Latin American counterparts would like to invite. Isn't it interesting, for instance, for Latin American readers to familiarise themselves with one of the first Indian English writers, Henry Louis Vivian derozio who belonged to Indo-Portuguese ancestry?

It should be expectedly interesting for readers to explore a wide array of regional cultural background from, namely Kamala Das to JayantaMahapatra to Nissim Ezekiel as well as Gurdiyal Singh. If someone like HarivanshRaiBachan, a Hindi language poet could be known in Britain, it

is equally possible to disseminate the rich literary ideas of Indian writing to another literarily conscious space like Latin America. The only requirement once the proposed literary contacts are established is to work for the same on a regular basis.

Outcomes of the Literary-Cultural Interaction

The foundation of a steady literary exchange and the production of comparative ideas beyond the regional boundaries are ensured through ground work in translation studies, comparative studies, criticism and linguistic competence. As determinedly emerging post colonial powers, India and Latin America could embark on a literary collaboration which in turn helps to redefine World Literature.

It could be argued that a meaningful exchange of literary and cultural themes between India and Latin America would enable to render 'alternative modernities' and, in turn, question any 'singular modernity', to employ the title of Fredric Jameson's book. The layered complexity of 'modernity', for instance, is projected in Oriyan writer, Fakir Mohan Senapati's novel, 'Six Acres and a Third'. As Satya P. Mohanty observes, a comparative analysis reveals similarities in narrative forms developed by Senapati and Garcia Marques, as in both writers challenge the colonial/neo-colonial powers in their society (4).

Similarly, it is only a matter of time when regional writers like Premchand, SaadatHasanManto, GirishKarnad, and so on (who by the way have already been well translated into Latin family of languages) find relevant comparative literary voices from Latin America to initiate a dialogue across cultures. Likewise, the evolution of genres in Latin American Literature in recent times has consistently been able to render forth new narrative forms, such as the 'testimonial literature', defined as literary expression that provides voices to the voiceless sections in society. The Guatemalan writer RigobertaMenchu is one such voice whose work, 'I, RigobertaMenchu' is a reflection as well as representation of Women's Testimonial Literature. As soon as such instances are registered among Comparative literary research, hope for the many similar marginalised and unheard of voices from India lightens up.

As a consequence, the traveller traverses new transcultural ground by attempting to bridge linguistic lacunae and registering voices to make available for translation studies to eventually searching for new correlations between voices including the marginalized ones.

Representation of World Literature: Indo Latin American Perspective

Garcia Marquez says, “My most important problem was destroying the lines of demarcation that separate what seems real from what seems fantastic.” The ‘lines’ have been attempted to be kept in check in various other ways in Indian writing as well. One name comes to mind is that of G. V. Desani, whose picaresque tale written in a polyglot style, ‘All About H. Hatter’ is the first serious attempt to break the conventional parameters of the so called ‘pure’ English by mixing it with colloquial expressions. Similarly, when authors like Maria Vargas Llosa and Amitav Ghosh employ multiple narrators in their fiction, they are inhibiting the ‘lines’ that underline a monologic grand narrative voice, in order to give way to a polyphonic narration with multiple narrative voices.

It is equally true for Indo Latin American literary exchanges that the generation of new thematic trends is possible only when ‘lines of demarcation’ are challenged so that a dialogic interaction between the national regional and global areas could be initiated. Indo-Latin American transcultural interaction could be a signifying contribution towards a pluralistic discourse of invigorating ideas based on the resolutions of their multilingual multicultural literary universe.

Finally, I would like to relate this shared vision of Arts and Culture between India and Latin America with the concept of World Literature in order to signify enrichment of cultural ties between two or various spaces through exposure to rich literary and oral traditions.

The recognition that a comparative literary exchange between the two areas has the potential to generate new thematic strands of signification must be associated first with the need to develop meaningful comparative literary scholarship. World literature should be manifested as a multiplicity of worlds, in which India and Latin America are some of the ‘worlds’ playing significant roles.

Speaking for the destruction of the ‘lines of demarcation’, the world shall be known by India, and the world shall be known by Latin America, for the ‘traveller’ deserves every chance to reach out to you and me, the way the master-traveller and explorer in Vasco da Gama had it in

him, and the way he would have us lead our steps forward and initiate another promising journey.

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