

World Literature: An Indian Way of Thinking

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Abstract: The idea of the world is a dynamic phenomenon, and the development of world literature is tied to both literary and extra-literary events. Worldwide literary centers can be found in many locations spanning both time and space. The concept of the world, or *Visva* (Sanskrit), is considerably older even if world literature has been a discursive framework that has affected the literary structures of many languages around the world since the 19th century. “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam,” or the universal neighborhood, is a term from ancient Indian literature that attests to the age of the concept of *Vasudha*, or the world. As a result of numerous trade routes, cultural interactions, the expansion of ancient and medieval kingdoms, and the transit of literary writings, cosmopolitan literary spaces were created in various parts of the world. Additionally, the absence of modern cartography and the sovereign state system enabled constant changes in the borders of the empires, resulting in spaces with many languages. India has connections to several Asian nations dating back to ancient times, as well as to Europe since the medieval period. The diverse traditions of human thought from various parts of the world are carried in Indian literature. Significant literary contacts and the ongoing formation of new literary legacies were witnessed in the East, Middle East, South East, and South Asia of the present. The Sufi and Bhakti traditions, the reception of Indian epics as oral, written, and performative texts in South-East Asia, and the role of the royal courts as multilingual literary spaces continue to broaden the intellectual traditions of Bharat (India). Thus, the pre-modern development of world literature seemed intriguing and a subject worth exploring for literary professionals. This essay contends that ancient and medieval India and Bengal, particularly their languages, continually bargained to expand their intellectual frontiers.

Keywords: *Visva-Sahitya*, world literature, Tagore, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Indian literature, Bengali literature, universal humanism

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अयं नजिः परो वेतगिणना लघुचेतसाम् ।
उदारचरतिनां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम् ॥

Ayam Nijah Paro Veti Ganana Laghucetasam
Udaracaritanam Tu Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam

This thing is mine, that thing is his—Such thoughts are of Narrow Mind
To the great-hearted people, this entire world is a family.

—Maha Upanishad VI, 71

Introduction

World Literature is a method of expanding the horizon of knowledge and the idea of the world within literary studies, and collective initiatives of a linguistic community or a nation continuously shape world literature in a particular language. This essay traces the history of inter-lingual exchanges of literature and ideas in ancient and medieval India in general and Bengal in particular. Ancient and medieval geographical and linguistic identities of spaces were not the same as we understand today about a particular space. For example, the language today known as Bangla was not as popular as Bangla in medieval Bengal but it was mostly known as Gaudiya Bhasha or the Gaudiya language. Moreover, our literary understanding and cultural spaces of today's world are mostly identified by the British administrative definitions but ancient and medieval spaces were known in the names of the kings of the regions or by their culture and language. Such naming of the spaces is significant in connecting people with the land and those who are unique to the space. But British categorization of spaces made the naming of the spaces similar to each other for their administrative ease.

Orientalists and Nationalists in colonial India and after independence also engaged themselves with reinventing India's past of the ancient and medieval era to discover a great civilization here as there was in Europe. Greater India Society along with the Nationalists and Orientalists started emphasizing constructing historical narratives of ancient and medieval India to find Greater India or "Brihattara Bharat" and also to establish the greatness of Indian civilization. Expansion of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata traditions in various parts of the Indian subcontinent and especially the expansion of the Ramayana tradition in today's South East Asia is observed as the territory of Brihattara Bharat or the greater India, which is the cultural imagination of India. Literary texts and traditions circulated and expanded through trade, religion, and the spread of the kingdom of various Indian kings.

The World and the Literature: An Indian Context

The idea of the world is expressed in multiple terms and connotations in ancient India and adhered to in modern and contemporary India in various contexts. The words popularly used to talk about the earth or the world are “Vasudha,” “Vasundhara,” “Jagat,” “Prithibi”/“Prithwi,” “Dhara”/“Dharani”/“Dharitri,” “Kshiti,” and “Visva,” etc. *Vasudha* and *Vasundhara* mean the earth which inherits and keeps the wealth; it also denotes place, the surface of the earth. *Prithibi* and *Prithwi* mean the earth, a geological entity. The most significant term among all these mentioned above is *Visva*, which means, entire, whole, and endless. This term is as old as the *Rig Veda* and as contemporary as today. World Literature in many Indian languages including Bengali is known as “Visva-Sahitya.” *Visva-Sahitya* was popularized by Tagore; however, he used this term to replace “Comparative Literature” in his lecture delivered in the National Council of Education in Calcutta in 1907.

Tagore was fond of Goethe and he also wrote a few pieces about him. Rabindra-Bhaban of Visva Bharati, a university established by Tagore, kept many German books read by Tagore. Perhaps this phrase “Visva-Sahitya” was his translation of World Literature as uttered by Goethe. However, Tagore used it to replace “Tulamulak-Sahitya,” or Comparative Literature, as I mentioned. After Tagore, many intellectuals dealt with the literary category called World Literature. This case is quite interesting because no formal department of World Literature existed in Indian academic institutions even two decades ago. Comparative Literature was introduced in 1956 at Jadavpur University and the University of Calcutta introduced Comparative Literature as a methodology to compare Indian vernaculars in 1919, as envisioned by Sir Asutosh Mukerji, vice-chancellor (1906-1914 and 1921-1923) of the University of Calcutta and a thinker, an educationist of the late 19th and early 20th century.

Interestingly the volumes of books translated from European literature into various Indian languages are known as *Visva-Sahitya*, and the category is formed by translators, literary critics, editors, and publishers. It is again interesting to observe that the idea of *Visva-Sahitya* which is inherited and practiced in Bengali and many other Indian languages irrespective of the critical discourses on World Literature has emerged in Europe and America. It was colonial modernity that shaped the idea of *Visva-Sahitya* in India in terms of categorizing translations and publishing literature from Europe and later from America. Though the texts as a corpus of World Literature are well received in Indian languages, the critical discourses of World Literature from various schools of Europe and America are mostly unnoticed. Hence, the early texts known as *Visva-Sahitya* in India were necessarily from Europe. Later American texts, literature by the Nobel Laureates and their respective nations, and literature produced in solidarity with the people’s movement and war victims were also considered as *Visva-Sahitya* in India. Beyond European colonialism, there was another historical and political phenomenon that brought significant changes in the Indian intellectual mind: the Soviet Revolution and the literature translated from the World Literature Translation Center, Moscow, and later from Beijing.

When we talk about world literature in Bhasha, or world literature in any Indian language, we fix our location in that particular text. Bhasha forms its idea of world literature in many ways, and those are, primarily and most significantly, translation of literature from different parts of the world, with the critical discourses of literary reception found in Bhasha, following the path of cultural icons, and also with the cultural exercises like book fairs, literary meetings, visits of the poets, and their interactions with the Bhasha poets. Bhasha always historicizes world literary texts in their given historical, cultural, and political contexts. The entire history of translation in Bhasha is coherently embedded within the Bhasha literary system.

As a former colonial subject and as the market of capitalist products and space of imperial experiments, India finds its solidarity with many other such countries. Therefore, all the oppressed are being responded to by the Bhasha authors and translators. These responses are sometimes very significant cultural and political responses. Coolie migration in British colonies and war have a significant role in the formation of ideas of the world in cultural minds and therefore world literature.

All these aforementioned ways are world literature in praxis; besides this, there are theoretical essays on world literature. And such theoretical essays are not yet greatly explored in any of the Bhasha literature. Also, we did not focus on such texts to develop our own theoretical claim about world literature. More interestingly, Indians are visibly reluctant to translate theoretical essays written in Bhasha and form any school of thought. Our focus is on translating creative literature that is too limited in South Asia circulation, as I mentioned previously.

In our academic contexts in India, we talk about world literature in English, and in Comparative Literature departments, the mode of instruction is English and world literature as a course is not frequently offered. We can hardly find any department called “World Literature,” other than English and Foreign Language University. Indian Bhasha disciplines also hardly offer world literature as a course. Thinkers who write about world literature in Bengali hardly teach world literature as a course in their academic disciplines, though there are a few exceptions. For my reference, I take Tagore, Nazrul, Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Nalinikanta Gupta, Brajendra Chandra Bhattacharya, Chittaranjan Bandopadhyay, Saroj Bandopadhyay, and Nirendu Hazra. I argue that the ancient idea of *Visva* in Sanskrit and a kind of universal humanism that emerged in ancient and medieval India also shaped critical understanding of world literature in India. Hence, the modern and contemporary concept of world literature in India is mostly informed by the idea of universal humanism.

Universal Humanism and World Literature: Tagore and Chatterji

Tagore in his “*Visva Sahitya*” argued that reading literature in its narrow context of time and space is an inadequate reading of literature; if we read it as a manifestation of the universal human, we will be able to read the truth. The universal human is making a temple of literature, there is

no blueprint for it, but the un-truth is rejected by him, and the authors of the world across time, languages, and spaces are contributing their creativity to the universal human to build the temple. Makarand Paranjape commented on Tagore's idea of world literature, "However, what Tagore meant by *Visva-Sahitya* was neither comparative literature nor world literature as we understand it. Rather, he was presenting, yet again, his own unique formulation of not just philosophy but the glory of literature" (28). He quoted from Tagore's "*Visva-Sahitya*,"

Do not so much as imagine that I will show you the way to such a world literature. Each of us must make his way forward according to his own means and abilities. All I have wanted to say is that just as the world is not merely your plough field, plus my plough field, plus his plough field, because to know the world that way is only to know it with a yokel-like parochialism, similarly world literature is not merely your writings, plus my writing, plus his writings. We generally see literature in this limited, provincial manner. To free oneself of that regional narrowness and resolve to see the universal being in world literature, to apprehend such totality in every writer's work, and to see its interconnectedness with every man's attempt at self-expression—that is the objective we need to pledge ourselves to. (28-29)

Tagore was against any kind of provincialism and parochialism and he believed that literature creates a parallel world that makes the ordinary wretched life more bearable, as Paranjape pointed out (29). Tagore believed in universal humanism and literature is such a space that has shared mutual contact zones of universal humanism. If we see the message of the *Upanishads*, the concept of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" is very much reflected in Tagore's concept of *Visva-Sahitya*, where Tagore celebrated the glory of literature itself. The above quotation is a reflection of the thought which is influenced by the message of the *Upanishads* as I quote at the beginning of this paper.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji, a linguist and an exceptional theorist of World Literature in India, envisioned World Literature as the literature of the entire world and not any particular space. Rabindrakumar Dasgupta found him to be the most original, profound, and unique thinker of World Literature in India. According to him, World Literature of the West is the literature of the West. Arnold Toynbee who talked about the provincial way of thinking of Europeans is also applicable to the world literature thinking of Europe as Dasgupta mentioned in his article entitled, "*Acharya Sunitikumarer Visvasahitya-Chinta*," ("*Thoughts on World Literature of Suniti Kumar*"). According to Dasgupta, Chatterji did not write about World Literature after reading anything about it from any book, he started to inherit the literature of the world and then proposed his structure of world literature as an imaginary undivided universal world literature where he accommodated various kinds of literature written in various languages of the world. As the words are connected, languages are connected with each other, literatures are also connected with each other. The 19th-century development of linguistics and relations among various languages of Europe and South Asia, South Asia and East or South East Asia informed a structure of undivided universal World Literature as mentioned by Dasgupta. But he was silent about the fact from where he

perceived such a notion about world literature. He is primarily a linguist and in the introduction of his book *World Literature and Tagore*, he mentioned that “I have never been a serious or professional student of literature in the sense that I have never devoted myself exclusively to the study of literature as a regular discipline” (132). And he also was not trained in the disciplinary development of the world literature and historiography of the discipline as it is found among the thinkers in Europe and America.

Chatterji imagined world literature in his discovery of relations of languages of the world and he informed in his book *Balts and Aryans in Their Indo-European Background* that he was interested in the languages which were close to Sanskrit and therefore, he claimed a Persian with knowledge in Sanskrit could understand Lithuanian easily (1). Dasgupta argued that in world literature, this phrase may be new but the content of world literature is not. In ancient Greece, Greek was the only literature, but in the world of Latin literature, there was both Greek and Latin, and in medieval Europe, literature written in modern European languages was added to Greek and Latin literature (133). This is how throughout the ages the content of world literature has been enriched, diversified, and grown. In ancient India also there was evidence of Sanskrit and Tamil literature in the period, then Prakrit, Pali, and then Persian and Arabic in the medieval period along with many modern Indian languages exchanged literary ideas and texts with each other. Through the entry of Persian with political power a large heritage of literature from the Middle East also entered India.

Dasgupta was informed that Thomas Carlyle (1796-1881) wrote a letter to Goethe on January 22, 1831, where he mentioned world literature as a “Universal Commonwealth.” Chatterji’s idea about world literature is also the same as Carlyle’s. He further informed that 19th-century Bengali intellectuality was about inheriting the world in mind. Rammohun Roy wrote in 1832 that “All mankind are one great family of which numerous nations and tribes existing are only various branches” (qtd. in Dasgupta 134). Dasgupta in this essay on Chatterji tried to bring a history of the development of the idea of *Vīsva* as reflected in various works of literary criticism and writings of 19th-century literary practitioners. After Rammohan, he talked about the Sanskrit pandit Vidyasagar who criticized the Vedanta and Sankhya as false systems of philosophy and mentioned the limitations of Sanskrit poets in creating Veer, Hasya, and Vayanak Rasa. He perceived literature as a unified whole. According to Dasgupta, Rangalal Bandopadhyay, the first critic of Bengali poetry, “Bangla Kabita Bishayak Prabandha” (1842), talked about a “Kavyalakshmi,” a goddess of poetry, who created poetry in different times, space, and languages. Chatterji argued that the “Prachyami,” or the East-ism or the narrow idea of patriotism is not good for art. Bengali poets like Madhusudan Dutta and novelists like Bankimchandra both inherited the idea of east and west together and tried to locate themselves within the world. Chatterji in his “Report of the Official Language Commission,” in 1956, described English as the language of world civilization and also a source for “making us firmly established in our national heritage of Indianism” (qtd. in Dasgupta 135).

Chatterji understood world literature as the total literature of the world and the same way he

imagined world culture also. Another way of imagining world literature to him was the classics of the world. He, like Tagore, imagined Indian literature in its unity and he imagined Indian literature as world literature. The 3000-year-long history of India is the history of cultural and literary exchanges with the world. India inherits the world through its long journey in historical dialogues with various parts of the world. Hence, the world literature from the Indian location was not imagining any particular center as the center of world literature, but world literature as extended across the world and it is not Europe but it is his own birthplace which can relocate and redefine world literature. In his 1971 book *World Literature and Tagore*, he divides the literature of the world into national classics and world classics. In the third chapter of this book, he divided world literature further into ten types. The title of the chapter is “The Ten Great Literary Complexes and Works of Individual World Figures in Literature” (41). At the beginning of the chapter, he commented:

Leaving aside single works of small compass, the following *Ten Great Complexes* or *Masses of Literary Output*, whether of a series of unknown authors or whether they are ascribed in part or whole to a single author, appear to me to include all the most significant works of permanent value for the whole of humanity in what may be truly described as *World Literature*. (41)

The *Ten Great Complexes* are as follows: 1. *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*; 2. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*; 3. Hebrew Bible; 4. *Shahnamah* by Firdausi; 5. The Arthurian Corpus; 6. *The Arabian Nights*; 7. The Works of William Shakespeare; 8. The Writings of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; 9. The Writings of Tolstoy; 10. The Works of Rabindranath Tagore (44-45). This is a structural combination of the ages through which a universal modern man is made. His world literature was in search of universal humanism as Tagore also was a worshipper of universal humanism and therefore he was even against pan-Asianism, and nationalism. Chatterji commented that complexes 1, 2, 3, and partly 4 and 5 hark back to the Axial millennium, 4, 5, and 6 “indicate the medieval expansion of ideas along the varied lines of Christianity and Islam, both in the mundane and mystical sides.” And the 7, 8, 9, and 10 represent the universal humanism of modern man inherited from the past. In the “Epilogue” of his book, Chatterji wrote,

World Literature, as we have seen, is thus the sum total of most beautiful and the most elevating things, the truest realities and the deepest emotional experiences, and the most intellectual and the most idealistic quests within the entire gamut of human life and existence, that has been expressed in convincing language, beautiful or rugged, for serving man on the intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual planes. (211)

Chatterji offered a few criteria of world literature according to his taste and philosophy, but in this epilogue he mentioned that this combination also is restructured according to some other

rationale. He stated that this proposal was “arrived at by the consensus of the general agreement of humanity through the centuries and millennia” (211). In this proposal, he also opened a scope for non-hierarchical literary structure of world literature, and any text that talks about humanity, *Visva-Manabata*, and universal humanity is part of world literature. The formation of world literature is not closed but is an endless process of discovering and re-discovering literature of the world and the formation of new dialogues and narratives of humanity. Chatterji states that the individual characteristics of any literary text are not lost in the process of world literature, but all the literature together becomes the inner voice of the universal human. His *Africanism*, *Indianism*, *Dravidism*, *India and Ethiopia* and *Iranianism* are evidence of his quest for universal humanism and disavowal of any kind of cultural hierarchy and Euro-centrism.

World Literature in the Pre-Modern Context

Chatterji in his book *Sanskritiki*, located Indian literature in various nations of the world and that is how he traced Indian literature as world literature. His focus was on the pre-modern circulation of Indian classics and Buddhist literature in Afghanistan, Russia, Turkmenistan, China, Japan, Korea, Myanmar, Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines. And thus, he argues that Buddhist literature is world literature. He also traces the history of circulation and reception of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana in South-East Asia. His unique concept of “Brihattara Bharat,” or Greater India, is locating India in the world in the pre-Islamic history of India: how the traders and merchants, sailors, Brahmins, Bhikshus, artists, and common people traveled to various countries and communicated with the languages, cultures, and people of those places. Chatterji argues this is how India extended to the world with its rich heritage of literature, culture, and philosophy (qtd. in Chattopadhyay 190).

Tagore and his disciple Chatterji were in agreement that they were not proposing any ultimate model of world literature but both of them celebrated literature since its beginning in human history as the common philosophical ground of making *Visva-Manav*, or the universal human. Any literature in any context in response to that universal human may be considered world literature. Chatterji, as a linguist who was finding common ground and exchanges among languages from various parts of the world, was not at all bothered about Eurocentrism. He neither promoted, rejected, or ignored it, but was in search of something parallel to the unity of the human mind in the world.

The way he was imagining the world and rediscovering the Indian connection with various parts of the world in the second half of the 20th century was with reference to ancient and medieval Indian texts. In his book *India and Ethiopia from Seventh Century B. C.*, Satapatha-Brahmana (8th century BC) informs a few names of the rulers of the Near East and Egypt ruling between 700 BC to 660 BC. The connection of Taharqa and Tarksysa of Satapatha-Brahmana brought the possibility of a connection between India, Egypt, and Ethiopia. His interest to locate

this historical connection and locate literature as a source of the history of exchanges between the ancient states also came out of his interest in the ancient heroic and romantic literature of different peoples, as he grew interested in Queen Maqeda of Sheba and King Solomon of Judaea as found in the Ethiopian tradition (ix-x). Through his idea of “Iranianism,” as reflected in *Iranianism: Iranian Culture and Its Impact on The World from Achaemenian Times*, Chatterji talked about the national epic of Iran Shah-Namah and located it as a contact zone of the world. With this literary reference and literary connection of medieval India and Iran he relocates world literature in the Indo-Iranian context.

King Shri Sudharma (1622-1638) of Rosang State, which is now under Myanmar, was a great devotee of literature and art. His principle advisor Ashraf Khan, a Chisty in faith, requested Daulat Kazi, a Sufi, to compose Lor Chandrani from Awadhi into Desibhasha. Sudharma’s royal court was packed with poets from different languages and said that,

Arbi-Farsi Nana Tatwa-Upadesh
Bibidha Prasanga Katha Achhila Bishesh
Gujarati-Gohari-Thet Bhasha Bahutara
Sahaje Mahanta-Sabha Ananda Niyara (Sen 24)

Philosophy-Ethics in Arabic-Persian
And many other subjects of Knowledge
Discussed in Gujarati-Gohari and Thet Language
People at the Royal Court get Pleasure and are Pleased (my trans.)

The above-quoted lines show the multilingual reality of the Rosang Royal Court. However, the people of the Rosang State do not understand Awadhi, Hindavi, Gohari-Thet, etc., so Ashraf Khan ordered Daulat Kazi to compose the poems into Panchali-Meter Desibhasha, which is known as Bangla. It is worth mentioning that the 17th century also did not recognize this language as Bangla.

But this connection between Myanmar and Bengal is again traced back to the 6th century BC when Muslims from Iran came and settled in the Hindi-Punjab region and started producing Persian literature along with Indian literature. Turks and Pathans entered India in the 13th century and gradually conquered north to central Eastern India. Romantic epic poetry or narrative poetry was introduced by Muslim poets into Hindi and Bengali literature in the 15th-16th century.

In his masterpiece work on the literature of the Arakan region of present-day Myanmar, D’Hubert, like many Bengali literary historians, located the multicultural reality of the city and how the worlds met there in the medieval period and caused a large number of translations to be made from various sources including Persian.

... the Mrauk U period is seen as a Golden Age, witnessing the maximal territorial

expansion of the kingdom and its inclusion as a major player in the emerging trading, diplomatic, and religious networks of the Bay of Bengal. For this Golden Age, we have a Golden Palace, which became part of the king's title, royal eulogies—including those composed by Bengali poets—and its mention of figures among the typical tropes about Arakan in contemporary travel narratives. [...] its (Arakan) rich markets and neighbourhoods organized by the ethnic origins and religions of the inhabitants: the Portuguese Christians in the western part of the town, the Hindus in the South, and Muslims in the harbour, whereas the large Buddhist monasteries, libraries, and pagodas were located in the eastern and northern parts of the city. (D'Hubert 3-4)

Sisir Kumar Das, the doyen of comparative literature in India and historian of Indian literature, informs that Islam came to India eighty years after the death of Prophet Muhammad. Also, at the same time, Arabs conquered Persia, Syria, Egypt, the whole of northern Africa, and Spain. The cultural contact between Hindus and Muslims in India began in the 8th century and India was gifted with poets and historians like Al-Beruni and Amir Khusrau (1253/54-1325). This very historical moment may be observed as the significant literary contact zone where two different worlds meet together and create literary heritages even today. Amir Khusrau has written nearly a hundred books and he was described by Zaidi as, "Khusrau combines in himself the twin streams of Persian and Urdu-Braj-Khariboli, a confluence of sophisticated sentiments of Persian and the emotional appeal of indigenous Indian poetry" (qtd. in Das 25). From the 15th century, Sufi mysticism and Perso-Arabic romance became a new component of Indian literature. The gradual expansion of Islam through the sub-continent caused the interaction of Sufism and Islam with various Indian Bhashas and that resulted in multiple branches of culture and literary texts emerging across the Indian languages. Most significantly, Urdu as a language of common origin emerged with the interaction between Perso-Arabic and Indian languages (Das 25-26). Urdu may be observed as a point where world literature exists in medieval India.

River of Fire by Qurratulain Hyder, a novel translated from her Urdu original *Aag Ka Dariya*, beautifully portrays the almost 3000-year-old history of Indian culture. This novel shows how India interacts with new cultures, civilizations, and philosophical thoughts in different periods of time. This novel shows how the idea of Indianness is built from the reception, conflict, amalgamation, and syncretism of multiple traditions. The entire narrative of this novel is the history of the making of *visva*, the world in Indian intellectual and ordinary lives. It traces syncretic polyphonic Indian culture from the oldest university in ancient India, accounts of the Greek travelers, and Chinese travelers, the making of Hindustan, the expansion of Sufism, and the heritage comes through its Arab, African, and Spanish expansion, and the confluence of Sanskrit, Persian, and Urdu, etc.

The Chinese classic *Monkey King: Journey to the West*, also portrays the medieval imagination of the world. The recent translation of it puts a map of the world as found in the narrative of the book at the beginning of it. In the introduction of the book, Julia Lovell writes,

It recounts a Tang-dynasty monk's quest for Buddhist scriptures in the seventh century, accompanied by an omnitalented kung fu monkey king called Sun Wukong, one of the most memorable reprobates in world literature; [. . .] (it is) an index to early modern Chinese culture, thought, and history; its stature in East Asian literature may be compared with that of *The Canterbury Tales* or *Don Quixote* in European letters. (ix)

This medieval text through its journey to Buddhism connects China with India, Nepal, and East/South East Asia. This is how the texts appear as the center of world literature.

World Literature: Other Thinkers

Kazi Nazrul Islam's (1899-1976) categorization of world literature is quite interesting and realistically achievable. He defines the nature of world literature with two concepts: one is the "Swapan-Bihari" ("Traveler of the Dream") and the other one is "Matir Dulal" ("Child of the Earth"). The first is more spiritual and holds the essence of eternity; the second is the literature of the temporal-real. The first includes Milton, Shelley, Noguchi, Yeats, and Tagore; and the second includes Gorky, Johan Bojer, George Bernard Shaw, Benavente, and Anatole France. There is another category that does not belong to either of these two categories, and authors belonging to this do not revolt against the travelers of the heaven of dreams and love of the earthly world. Nazrul names Leonid Andreyev, Knut Hamsun, Wadishal, and Rainmod as authors of this category of world literature. They have consumed the "Halahal" ("Poison") of the earthly world but they achieved the *Shivatva*. The poets whom Nazrul meant as Matir Dulals believed that all the oppressions and exploitations should come to an end with revolution, not by natural evolution in the civilization. Keats, a poet of the first category of authors says, "A thing of beauty is a joy forever. Beauty is truth, truth beauty"¹ (qtd. in Nazrul 168), and in opposition to it, according to Nazrul, stands Whitman, who says, "Not physiognomy alone- / Of physiology from top to toe I sing, / The modern man I sing" (168). The wave of the First World War did not touch this side of the Arabian Sea directly, but this great war of ideas has shaken the entire world, as Nazrul supposed. Nazrul envisioned the well-received and celebrated position of the authors belonging to the category of his *Matir Dulal*. He also wished a significant place for the poets who sacrificed their lives for the cause of the people and fought against capitalist, imperialist, and fascist forces of the world. He was named Merezhkovsky and Pushkin. For example, Dostoevsky is more adored than Tolstoy. Nazrul believed that Tolstoy's "God" and "Religion" are insignificant in the context of the suffering of the people of Russia under the Tsar's rule. This Nazrulian model of world literature significantly argues with references from Indian mythology, which means he contextualizes all the authors and conflicts among them, the war of ideas, and the difference between the spiritual and the real with the similes from Indian mythology.

Nazrul was a propagator of peace in world literature. And so, in his imagination, Chekhov welcomes Gorky, and Gorky's tiredness brought Knut Hamsun and Bojer to us. Nazrul compares literature to anchoring it in his own location. He finds Bojer's swan of *Great Hunger* is "Ananda" of the *Upanishads*, and the protagonist of *The Prisoner Who Sang*, according to Nazrul is "Satchidananda." Hamsun's Pan from the *Growth of the Soil* expresses agony like the Rishis of the *Vedas* to Nazrul. And the mind gets peace in these agonies from Legarlof's fairy tales. Nazrul moves towards Scandinavian countries, small nations of Europe. He listens to Noguchi's "The sound of the bell that leaves the bell itself" (173), and listens to Tagore, "I listen to your song because I sink in the silence comes at the end of your song" (173), he dreams of Persian music, Arabian flute, Turkey's dance, and Keats's "Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!" (173). This is how one recreates one's own heritage of thought and act, one's own map of literature, own narrative of people, peace, and pleasure. Nazrul's world literature is not composed of translated literature but literature inherited by a serious reader and thinker who is part of a collective of the literary receptors of the time.

In "Biswasahitya," Brajendra Chandra Bhattacharya was very much conscious about mere textual comparative literature and he warns that this kind of literary criticism often puts two literary texts in a hierarchical relation. A comparative study between two literary texts to understand one's greatness is usually initiated by relatively marginal literary communities whose literary texts are compared. Bhattacharya rejected literary greatness as a paradigm of world literature. Chatterji comments in his *World Literature and Tagore*, "Comparisons are odious, and if we understand that each manifestation in literature has its own proper place and its inevitability within its proper historical and cultural *milieu*, we shall cease to be exercised over the question of a rigid hierarchy in the sum total of the literary output of the world" (1). Bhattacharya's approach to the world and the philosophy of writing should be the central focus of literary criticism, as Bhattacharya argues. The literature that touches the deepest root of the *Biswamanab-Man* can be considered world literature; for example, he referred to Chinese peasants in *Good Earth*, besides, *Hamlet*, or *King Lear*.

In 1950, Nalinikanta Gupta classified literature into two general categories: "Visva-Sahitya" and "Gramyasahitya,"² universal literature and regional literature. The poets having "Visvaabhab" ("Worldly Emotion") and "Visvabaak" ("Worldly Utterances") are the world poets. But he also emphasized the literary history of the origin of the world poet. European poets did not unconditionally appear to him as the poets of world literature but he suggested names and quality of writing by individual authors in English, French, and German with reference to respective literary histories. Moreover, the role of the literary critics is also taken into serious consideration to form the idea of world literature in a particular literary system.

Visvabhab, he defines, is not cosmopolitanism, because it is a modern concept. *Visvabhab* was also found in Dante, Homer, and Valmiki's works. It transcends the boundary of *desh* and *kaal*.³ He claimed that Dante, Homer, Valmiki, and the creations of the ancient poets of *Vedas* are truly world literature, and he again argued that very few examples among contemporary or modern literature may be considered as world literature such as these are. They are not world literature

because they have been circulated most in the modern period, but these have been received equally in the medieval period by the readers of various communities across the space (Gupta 38). *Visvasahitya* is “Prakrita Sahitya,” or true literature and the philosophy of “Prakrita Sahitya” is “sub specie aeternitatis,” which means, “in the perspective of the eternal,” in Spinoza’s philosophy (87). He believed in the aesthetic value of poetry; his opinion was that pure poetry is the poetry for the world. Aesthetically sacred poetry is world poetry. In that sense he included Chandidas and Vidyapati from medieval Bengali and Maithili literature (35).

Conclusion

In this essay, I have tried to bring a few instances from ancient and medieval literature which are received beyond the location of their origin and also continuously perceived even today. Besides this I have brought few thinkers and their ideas of world Literature, and I argue that the concept of world literature by these modern thinkers is actually inspired by the ancient Indian idea of universalism. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, are received as literature of universal value and the philosophy of transcending any kind of limitations. The ideas of *Visvabhab* are something which have their inherited meaning of transcending any kind of limitations. The thinkers of world literature perceived world literature not as cosmopolitan or classic but something that can be located beyond time and space and can extend such values which are human values and not limited to any realistic or romantic context of the local. I argue this definition of world literature put forward by 20th-century Indian thinkers inspired by the message and value of universalism are not only found in ancient Indian philosophical and literary texts but also flowed since the ancient period. World literature is defined by Indian thinkers as the literature of universal human emotions, and it is not just a mere word but Indian people inherited such thoughts, believed in such thoughts, and practiced such thoughts in their literary, cultural, and religious lives. Hence the idea of world literature as proposed by Tagore, Chatterji, and other thinkers is actually a sincere reflection of the reality of the Bhaba or emotion already there in the Indian mind. Though the idea of world literature as *Visva Sahitya* is found in the West, Indian thinkers located ancient and medieval literature in this framework suitably in terms of their continuous reception beyond time, space, and language. This essay particularly does not focus on the pre-modern circulation of literary texts, however, and found pre-modern literature as a flesh and skeleton where the ancient Indian values are put to complete the structure of world literature in the 20th century context in India. Such alternative views found in non-Anglophone literature are hardly recognized in the discourses or disciplines of world literature but they have been formed quite independently in Indian Bhasha as the contribution of critics of world literature in Bhasha. This kind of perception of world literature also shows how non-Anglophone marginal languages perceive the idea of the world or *visva* with a diachronic and synchronic study of literature with their bilingual or trilingual knowledge. The thinkers of world literature, with reference to universal humanism and subsequently universal humanism reflected in universal literature caused in world literature, tried to hold the world in

their thinking and tried to be world citizens intellectually.⁴

Notes

1. The first line quoted is taken from English poet John Keats's *Endymion*, Book I; the narrative poem begins with this line. The second line is taken from his "Ode on a Grecian Urn."
2. Gram or Grama means village or rural area in modern Indian languages. Gramyasahitya means local literature or non-polyphonic literature, or literature which is not classic or of high merit.
3. *Desh* means country or nation but it is used here, as popularly used in many Indian languages including Bengali, to mean space. Also, it is used to mean the minimum geo-cultural unit with which a community associates its identity. Kala means time in Sanskrit and this word is also adopted in various modern Indian languages.
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