

Editors' Note

This joint issue (Numbers 2 and 3) of *Sahitya: The Journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India* goes online just in time for the XI CLAI Biennial International Conference being hosted by the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University. It was delayed for various reasons, but perhaps it is apt that the journal's current issue should coincide with the CLAI conference being hosted by the first full-fledged Department of Comparative Literature in India.

The theme of this year's CLAI conference is "The Journey of Comparative Literature: India and Beyond"; evidently the focus of the conference is on exploring the location of Comparative Literature pedagogy in India today and mapping its evolution. This issue, too, almost as a matter of coincidence perhaps, carries several essays on the contemporaneity of Comparative Literature which try to respond to recent developments and trajectories in academia.

The section on 'Essays', thus, starts off with a contribution from Dorothy Figueira, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Georgia, Athens, that explores the narrative of Comparative Literature pedagogy against the trope of World Literature in the US American context. It ends up as a timely re-examination of the notion of World Literature and redefines its relationship with our discipline. This is immediately followed by "About the Social Relevance of the Study of Culture and Literature" by Steven Totosy de Zepetnek, founding editor of *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, where he evinces somewhat similar concerns as he goes on to explore the relationship between Comparative Literature and comparative cultural studies and chart a path for the humanities of the future. Totosy de Zepetnek's essay is complemented by a note from Ipshita Chanda (Jadavpur University) that tries to take the debate further. We welcome further contributions to the debates on Comparative Literature pedagogy and history for our next issue.

Such debates centering round a re-examination of the locus of Comparative Literature are particularly important, we feel, in the present Indian context. This has been one of the most productive periods in the history of our discipline in India in recent times. The discipline, which was formally born in India in 1956 (with the setting up of the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur) and which has a long 'pre-history' in our country, as argued by Sisir Kumar Das, has seldom enjoyed as much institutional visibility as it does today.

Not only do the older Comparative Literature departments continue to consolidate the field, the subject has made an entry at a number of new institutions over the last few years, including several of the new central universities. Indeed, the last few years have seen a flurry of activity related to Comparative Literature in India. Comparative Literature occupies an important and integral position in the curriculum at various levels in a fair number of universities in India today.

The efforts to introduce Comparative Literature as a discipline at the MA and MPhil levels at the Central University of Kerala (CUK), Kasaragod, materialized in 2009. It was followed by the Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar,

which was born in 2009 and which already has an MPhil-PhD programme in Comparative Literature. The Central University of Rajasthan, Kishangarh, has also been active in the field of Comparative Literature and hosted an important CLAI conference in 2012. Again, the Central University of Punjab, Bathinda, has a Centre for Comparative Literature, which now offers an integrated MPhil-PhD in Comparative Literature (since April 2010).

CLAI has been actively trying to nurture the interest in Comparative Literature at such institutions and is determined to provide a platform for those who believe in a holistic study of literature. We hope that these new, positive developments are only the tip of the iceberg; the ideology of inclusion, the respect for alterity and the spirit of interdisciplinarity that the discipline embodies will be found even more relevant than ever before in this age of globalization and multiculturalism, we are certain. These developments open up an entirely new vista of opportunity for a holistic study of literature and culture; they also make it important to scrutinize the contours of Comparative Literature as they are today and also examine where our discipline is headed. Thus, these three essays should have particular importance for comparatists in India.

These three texts are followed by a group of studies focused on specific literary/cultural traditions. Delhi University's T S Satyanath writes of the emergence of translation in the Indian context and attempts to link it up with the rise of Buddhism in his essay. Jatindra Kumar Nayak writes from within the milieu of Oriya literary culture; his essay attempts to highlight early responses to the printed word in the context of Orissa under colonial rule.

Smita Basu's (Jadavpur University) contribution to this webjournal is of archival as well as of scholarly interest; she focuses on Rajbanshi, one of the 'smaller' and less visible languages of West Bengal, and archives and annotates the Goalbandhani Gaan, a genre of oral culture that is tied up intimately with local rural life and belief system of the community. This is possibly the first time the Goalbandhani Gaan is being archived in print/ on the web. Using the possibilities offered by the medium of the webjournal, we also embed a video clip of the Goalbandhani Gaan performance as part of the essay.

Finally, Anwasha Dutta Ain looks at British Indian 'Company' poetry of the 19th century and examines how Calcutta, the seat of the British empire, is constructed in this body of literature.

As in the first issue of our journal, we carry here, too, sections on book reviews and translations. This issue of *Sahitya: The Journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India* carries reviews of four recent publications that would be of interest to Indian comparatists and members of CLAI. The 'Translations' section ventures into travel writing this time and carries Madhurima Mukhopadhyay's translation of Haraprabha Takeda's piece on Japanese women (*Japaner Nari*). Takeda's writings enjoy a particularly important position in history as she was probably the first Bengali woman to marry a Japanese man; she is well known for her *Bangamohilar Japan Jatra (A Bengali Lady's Journey to Japan)*, which was published in 1915 and was the first account of a Bengali woman's visit to Japan.

From the next issue, we also intend to resume 'reprinting' some of the landmark essays on Comparative Literature in India, a practice we had started in the inaugural number of this journal. We end by inviting our members to send in essays, translations and book reviews for the next issue of Sahitya. Contributions will be evaluated as usual by referees before publication; please send in all contributions by email to claikolkata@gmail.com or vasantdcac@gmail.com. We thank Anvesha Dutta Ain, Swagata Bhattacharya and Dheeman Bhattacharyya for editorial assistance rendered for this issue of the journal.

—Editors