

**Tracing the Early Developments of Sahitya Akademi (1954-1960):****Is There Something Comparative?****Tias Basu<sup>1</sup>****Abstract:**

To trace the history of Comparative Literature in India, not just as an academic discipline, but as an important method to read Indian Literature, it is necessary to locate it within the practice of literary criticism starting from the late nineteenth century, the introduction of the discipline in an anti-colonial setup and look at its eventual growth in the post-Independence Indian state's educational vision. This paper tries to look at Comparative Literature's relationship with the post-Independence Indian state's ideological pursuits by analysing the formation, initial activities and the publications of the Sahitya Akademi. Sahitya Akademi, a state funded body, has had a dialogue with Comparative Literature, since their initial years. The Sahitya Akademi, in its vision and functioning, talks about Indian literature as a singular category though written in many languages, while the practice of Comparative Literature in India tries to acknowledge the plurality in Indian Literature. The paper will try to trace the transactions and engagements between the literary practices of Sahitya Akademi and the discipline of Comparative Literature by specifically looking at the publication projects and the issues of Indian Literature, the journal of Sahitya Akademi, from 1954 to 1960.

**Keywords:** Sahitya Akademi, Comparative Indian Literature, Indian literature.

The history of comparative literature in India does not only entail tracing the trajectory of the study of Comparative Literature as an academic discipline but also looking at the manifold elements of literary discourses that contribute to the idea of 'comparativeness'. To do so, it is necessary to locate the practise of Comparative Literature in India within the practise of literary criticism starting from the late nineteenth century, the introduction of the discipline in an anti-colonial setup and look at its eventual growth in the post-Independence Indian state. This paper would specifically look at the growth of the discipline, mostly within the domain of literary discourse, in the context of the post-Independence Indian state's ideological pursuits. In order to do so, this paper shall take up Sahitya Akademi, India's academy of letters, as a case symptomatic of the ideological pursuit of the state and

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as an apparatus functioning within the domain of literature and culture, and hence look at its relationship and dialogue with the practise of Comparative Literature.

The primary reason why I look at the relationship of Sahitya Akademi with comparative literature in India is because of the academy's primary focus and the eventual theoretical turn in the practise of comparative literature in India, which happened to coincide in certain capacities but were not entirely the same. That is, the focus on Indian literature is something that creates these possibilities of overlaps between Sahitya Akademi and comparative literary practises. The academic practise of Comparative Literature in India too showed a definite theoretical turn in the 1970s when it started talking about a specific orientation of the discipline that is based in Indian reality. This orientation, which Sisir Kumar Das, Amiya Dev, Indra Nath Choudhuri, Ayappa Paniker, and other practitioners of comparative literature refer to as 'Comparative Indian Literature' has as its basis the idea of Indian literature. The debates around the conceptualization of Indian literature will be a mediating factor in the relationship between the Sahitya Akademi and Comparative Literature in India that this essay traces.

### **The Comparative Debate on Indian Literature**

In the case of India, where there are hundreds of languages spoken in specific geographical regions within the country and with existing bodies of literature for each of these languages, the question of what exactly constitutes Indian literature has been dealt with by a number of comparatists over time. Sisir Kumar Das has emphasised the fact that instead of talking about Indian literature as a singular homogenised category, one needs to take cognisance of the literatures of various Indian languages separately and study those with equal importance, thereby proposing to look at each of the bodies of literature 'as distinct expression of the experiences of each community. Das speaks at length about the formulations, 'unity in diversity' and Indian literature is one, 'though written in many languages', as products of a nationalist vision that tried to propagate the idea of a national literature as a unified whole, and argues that although there are commonalities and intersections in the literatures of Indian languages, those are neither coincidences nor because the literatures are homogenous in nature. Instead, the commonalities can be carefully studied using tools of comparative literature to understand their transactions with each other (Das xv). Amiya Dev, in his essay titled 'Comparative Literature in India', discusses an a priori location of comparative literature with regard to aspects of diversity and unity in India and talks of how defining Indian literature as both singular and plural is problematic and how, in the case of India, the study of literature should involve the notion of inter-literary process and a dialectical view of literary interaction. Dev writes:



"...Indian literature is not an entity but an inter literary condition in the widest possible sense of the concept... The inter literary condition of India, we should remember, reaches back much farther than its manuscript or print culture. For instance, *bhakti* -- a popular religious movement as both theme and social issue (stretching from the eighth to the eighteenth century) -- had a variety of textual manifestations in various Indian languages." (Dev 5)

Dev argues that the relationship between Indian commonality and differences is the primary site of comparative literature.

K. Ayyappa Pannikker has spoken of Indian literature as a mosaic of all the regional varieties. He goes on to propose how one may look at Indian literature by acknowledging the fact that the method of Comparative Literature is the only one to read Indian literature (Paniker 24). Swapan Majumdar, on the other hand, in his essay 'Comparative Literature: Indian Dimensions', begins with addressing the question of what Indian literature is in order to reach his argument on the validity of comparative literature in India. Majumdar writes:

"To begin with, we are struck by the very structural pattern of Indian Literature: is it singular or pluralistic? ... In fact, until quite recently, Indian Literature was considered by scholars here and abroad as a mere compendium of several regional literatures ... the Indian comparatist's approach is apt to be horizontal rather than vertical, be that thematic, genetic, or formalistic.

True, there is something like an 'Indianness' which is more to be perceived than to be formulated in concrete terms." (Majumdar 16)

Chakraborty talks about this idea of 'Indianness' not as a definitive category, but as a philosophical notion. He further states that this 'Indianness' is not to be considered a priori, but to be seen empirically, taking into consideration the scope of inclusion using a horizontal approach that comparative literature facilitates.

Indra Nath Chaudhuri, another important practitioner of Comparative Literature in India, one of the proponents of a specific orientation of Comparative Literature that is specific to India, talks about how, for a proper aesthetic and critical assessment of Comparative Indian literature, the Indian comparatists are making an effort to develop a distinct comparative criticism and form a 'meta language'—a meta language that accommodates Sanskrit poetics and western poetics within the scope of the literatures of India using an interdisciplinary approach (Chaudhuri 7-8). Talking about a method of comparative Indian literature, Chaudhuri inevitably goes back to how Indian literature can be looked at and traces the formulation back historically to see how initially, scholars like Albright

Weber, Sten Konow, Maurice Winternitz actually referred to Sanskrit literature when they spoke of Indian literature, and how over time, the idea has broadened its horizons to a collection of different literatures of the subcontinent. Indra Nath Chaudhuri focuses on the fact that Sanskrit and other languages should be taken to form Indian literature, which is one, even though it has at least twenty-two different manifestations in the twenty-two major languages of India as recognised by the Sahitya Akademi. Chaudhuri goes on to elaborate on an idea of 'Indianness' that might highlight the spirit of Indian literature as a sensibility that characterises the collective national psyche. This collective national psyche would be formed of myths, tales from the Puranic tradition, folklore, philosophical treatises, religious and spiritual expression, as well as contemporary social realities (Chaudhuri 25).

### **Formation of the Sahitya Akademi**

The idea of Indian literature happens to be central to the formation of Sahitya Akademi, India's official academy of letters, as well. The Sahitya Akademi was established on March 12, 1954, as a national organisation that would work towards the growth of Indian letters, set literary standards, facilitate the expansion of literary activities in all Indian languages, and, by means of all of these, promote cultural unity in the country (The Sahitya Akademi). The plan for the establishment of a national academy of letters is often traced back to 1944, when the Government of India accepted the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal's proposal to set up a national cultural trust that would consist of three academies, including the academy of letters. This plan was taken forward by the government of India formed after independence. Debates on the question of whether the government should take the initiative of establishing such an organisation or wait for competent individuals to develop something similar were considered for a while, but eventually, the urgency to establish the organisation was given priority. It was decided that the government would only set up the academies that would go on to work as autonomous institutions and that the government would not interfere in their functioning.

### **Linguistic Policies of the Indian Government**

In the nascent stages of nation-building after 1947, a definite vision of how India should be shaped the role of the Indian state. This vision, which later came to be known as the 'Nehruvian vision' of a new India, was strongly rooted in the beliefs of equality, secularism, and acceptance of plurality, with an ideology of democratic socialism that could help move India towards being a welfare state based on people's consent, bereft of dogma and violence, and strongly grounded in ethical values. This vision shaped the workings of the state vis-à-vis planning, community development, foreign policies,

decentralisation, employment, public health, education, culture, and so on (Das). Our area of concern, higher education, was also shaped by Nehru's vision of how India should be.

The debates around the linguistic division of states almost always found Jawaharlal Nehru reacting to those demands of "provincialism" (quoted in Husain) that would be harmful for the unity of the country. Despite his opposition, he had to accept the eventual reorganisation of India's states. The demand for a division of a state based on linguistic boundaries at that time would naturally remind one of the Partition of colonial India. Hence, any identity politics based on questions of religion, region, and language were seen as divisive. While Nehru dismissed the demands of the Shiromani Akali Dal to form a "Sikh nation" as being "fissiparous and divisive" (quoted in Husain), he was equally sceptical about a movement that wanted to hegemonize the nation into a singular linguistic community by advocating the demand for the introduction of Hindi written in Devanagari script as the national language of India. In fact, as Nehru opposed the possibilities of linguistic hegemony of Hindi and demands for linguistic identity-based separation of states, he remained strong in his support of linguistic diversity in India. In Nehru's essay titled 'The Variety of India', he talks about the question of diversity in India, which has gone on to be referred to metaphorically as 'unity in diversity'. This very idea initially formed the basis and the vision of the Sahitya Akademi, too.

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, the then education minister of the government of India, was another important figure who shared Nehru's vision and was extremely instrumental in the setting of the Akademi. Azad, elaborating on his idea of the 'national' that is not only diverse but open to transactions, said:

"It was India's historic destinies that many human races and cultures should flow to her, finding a home in her hospitable soil... Our languages, our poetry, our literature, our culture, our art, our dress, our manners and customs, the innumerable happenings of our daily life, everything bears the stamp of our joint endeavours ... our joint life have moulded us into a common nationality." (Quoted in Guha 25)

It was this shared vision of India that translated into the spirit of the three academies of India, namely, the Lalit Kala Akademi, the Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the Sahitya Akademi. The problem, however, for the third organisation came up in the dealing of the 'national' in the case of language and literature. Precedents of this sort in other countries, primarily Europe, promoting national cultures were easily guided by their national languages, which formed the basis of those nations. In the case of India, there was no national language that the Akademi could work on. The languages listed in Schedule 8 of the Constitution of India were all included under the purview of the Sahitya Akademi. Although it is imperative that the enlisted languages were only the ones that were widely spoken and

that several languages were excluded, it is safe to say that the ideological framework of India and its reflection on the functioning of the Sahitya Akademi did not promote linguistic parochialism, a hegemonic position of Hindi over other languages, but instead fostered the idea of equality among many Indian languages.

### Representation of Languages and Universities

The question of linguistic pluralism and its conscious efforts to curb the overdominance of Hindi have been reflected in the formulation of policies of the Sahitya Akademi as well. Initially, representatives from the fourteen scheduled languages and fourteen universities were to be chosen. These representations were chosen by the committee entitled to form the Akademi while being in direct correspondence with the government. The languages that were to be represented were Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Malayalam, Marathi, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Telugu, and Urdu. Eminent literary figures of each of these languages, like Nilmani Phukan in the case of Assamese, Acharya Kshiti Mohan Sen, who was substituted by Rajasekhar Basu owing to Sen's institute, Visva Bharati, already having an institutional representation in the case of Bengali, Shri K. M. Munshi in case of Gujarati, Dr. Hazari Prasad Dwivedi or Shri Diwinder Satyarthi in case of Hindi, Shri Mast Venkatesh Iyengar in case of Kannada, Shri Ghulam Hassan Beg in case of Kashmiri, Poet Vallathol in case of Malayalam, Shri B. V. also known as Mama Vareker, in case of Marathi, Dr. Maya Dhar Mansingh in case of Oriya, Shri Sher Singh in case of Punjabi, Professor K. A. S. Iyer or Shri. K. S. Krishnamurthy Sastrigal in case of Sanskrit, Shri Pingali Lakshminatham in case of Telugu, and Dr. S. S. Bhatnagar in case of Urdu were suggested. As regards to the fourteenth name to represent Tamil, the government of Tamil Nadu suggested one name, that of Rajaji. C. Rajagopalachari, who had served in a number of government ministerial positions from 1947 to 1952 and had been the Chief Minister of Madras State from 1952 to 1954, had already been nominated by the committee. (Sahitya Akademi – Setting up of)

The strategic inclusion of representations from the universities happens to be even more crucial. There were thirty universities across India at that time, of which the fourteen oldest established universities were to have representation. The fourteen universities that were chosen were Calcutta University, Bombay University, Madras University, Allahabad University, Benaras Hindu University, Mysore University, Patna University, Osmania University, Aligarh Muslim University, Lucknow University, Delhi University, Andhra University, Annamalai University, and Visva Bharati. The chronological list had Nagpur University on the eleventh position and Agra University on the fourteenth, but they were dropped from the list of representatives because "there were already three

representatives from the universities in the Hindi speaking areas". The correspondence related to the setting up of the Akademi also mentions:

“The only exception to the chronological rule is Visva Bharati. Visva Bharati was included because it is a Central University of a distinctive type. Though incorporated by an Act of Parliament only in 1951, it was established as far back as 1961 by Rabindranath Tagore and has been developed as a university with a definite bias towards literature.” (Sahitya Akademi – Setting up of)

It is to be noted that two universities, although part of the list of the first fourteen universities of the country, were not considered because there were already five universities from the Hindi-speaking region, namely Allahabad, Benaras, Aligarh, Lucknow, and Delhi, which would result in a linguistic disproportion in the committee. It also needs to be noticed that Visva Bharati was given preference not only because of its unique nature, its focus on literature, but also because Rabindranath Tagore was related to it.

### **Sahitya Akademi and the Question of Indian Literature: Concept and Literary Trends in Publications**

S. Radhakrishnan, the academy's first President's words "Indian literature is one though written in many languages" has become synonymous with the Akademi's introduction<sup>2</sup>. This unity in diversity argument in Indian literature surely embodies the nationalist aspiration of the organisation and reflects the Nehruvian vision, but it has been a matter of contention among the Indian comparatists. A navigation through the early projects and publications of the Sahitya Akademi would help provide an understanding of how this idea of Indian literature has been dealt with and if there has been a tendency towards homogenization of the diversities into a sense of unity or of a propagation of unity while making space for diversities.

### **Early Publication Projects**

One of the earliest projects identified and undertaken by the Sahitya Akademi was the National Bibliography of Indian Literature. Since there was no bibliographical information about published literary work in India and since the National Library, Calcutta, had taken up the project of bringing

<sup>2</sup> “Lipiya anek hastakkshar ek”, a rough Hindi translation of the same appears on the facade of Ravindra Bhavan, the building that houses the office of the Sahitya Akademi.

out annual bibliographies from 1954 onwards, the Sahitya Akademi decided to publish a bibliography of Indian literature of the twentieth century, restricted to 1953. The work took a very long time; four volumes divided on the basis of languages in a span of twelve years, from 1962 to 1974. Further volumes were published later, when more languages received recognition and a difference in focus in the work done by the National Library was noticed (Rao, 95). In 1965, the Sahitya Akademi started working on the *Who's Who of Indian Writers* which would include biographical and bibliographical information about eminent literary figures of the Akademi's languages of concern living at the time of the Akademi's inauguration. The book was published in 1961, followed by later editions in 1983, 1993, and 1999. Another project taken up by the Sahitya Akademi in its very first year of function was the histories of literature (Rao, 101). This series aimed at making the histories of literatures of different Indian languages available to readers of other Indian languages. Krishna Kripalani, the founder-Secretary's guidelines to the authors to maintain uniformity, will provide an idea of the framework that had been decided. Kripalani wrote:

"Each History should be of about 300 pages ... should aim at presenting in simple and clear outline the main trends in the development of the literature concerned, emphasising its creative aspects, with apt illustrations ... Derogatory criticism and rapturous eulogy should both be avoided ... Care should in particular be taken to see that nothing is said or insinuated to hurt the religious sensibilities of any sect or community ... It would be graceful not to praise one's own literature at the expense of the other literatures. For example, if the influence of modern Bengali literature on other Indian literatures is discussed, the debt should be acknowledged by other literatures ... The modern period which may be assumed to begin with the rise of the British rule in India and the introduction of the printing press, should be treated with particular sympathy and understanding. Impartial evaluation of the contemporary scene is always difficult. The attempt should, therefore, be to understand rather than criticise..." (Quoted in Rao)

It took an enormous amount of time for the project to see fruition, and it took forty-eight years to publish histories of twenty-one languages, some of which have been translated into other Indian languages as well.

*Contemporary Indian Literature*, Sahitya Akademi's first publication, came out in 1957 in the form of a symposium (Rao 110). It consisted of fifteen articles by fifteen writers on fifteen Indian languages and literatures. The articles aimed to provide a holistic background on the state of each of the literatures. Radhakrishnan's observation in the Foreword to the book is important to note:

"There is a unity of outlook as the writers in different languages derive their inspiration from a common source and face more or less the same kind of experience, emotional and intellectual". (Quoted in Rao)

*Bharatiya Kavita*, a project taken up by the academy in this nascent stage, planned to bring out annual anthologies of published poems in the Indian languages of Sahitya Akademi's recognition in Hindi translation and with Devanagari transliteration (Rao, 114). The 1953 issue was published in 1957, after which three anthologies covering the next three years were published, but with gaps. The fifth volume was planned to cover five years, then ten years, and was finally abandoned. This happened primarily because of the logistical problems of compiling the volumes, getting them translated, connecting with the authors, and getting permissions from the publishers.

In the later years, several other projects culminated in important volumes that are crucial to the reading of Indian literature. Some of these are *The Makers of Indian Literature* series, the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Literature*, *Ancient Indian Literature* edited by T. R. S. Sharma, *Mediaeval Indian Literature* edited by K. Ayyappa Paniker, and *Modern Indian Literature* edited by Sisir Kumar Das.

### **Trends in Literary Criticism in the Issues of *Indian Literature***

The Editorial Note of the first issue of *Indian Literature* in October 1957 makes its position clear in terms of its purpose and function. It states that the journal intends to supply information about literary activities in various Indian languages and to help writers and readers in the various Indian languages know each other better. It talks about how, the Akademi or the journal, being state-funded entities, were facing apprehensions about being an agency of control over literary activities in the country, and ascertains that it has no intention to do so; it only believes that an organisation like the Sahitya Akademi, should rather be funded by the state than run by private patronage. Despite its focus and roots in the idea of Indian literature, the issue does not restrict its scope of study to Indian literature, which only affirms its tendency to go beyond boundaries, even beyond the national. The section on critical writings has four essays pertaining to Indian literature and three on literature from other parts of the world. Of the four essays, one is an abridged section of S. Radhakrishnan's Introduction to the English translation of *Adi Granth*, one on Tagore's short stories, one on poet Vallathol of Kerala, and the last one looks at the literary impact of the year 1857 on its centenary year. The essays dealing with literature from other parts of the world are also varied in terms of geography, dealing with Japan, Bosnia, and America. This is followed by a section of obituaries and another section titled 'A Review

of Current Indian Writing," which consists of reports of contemporary literature in the fourteen languages initially recognised by the Sahitya Akademi, along with a section on Sindhi literature, a language outside the ones listed in the eighth schedule that had been recognised by the Akademi by then.

The second issue follows a similar pattern of contents, where among the critical essays were two on Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Vallathol, respectively; one essay on modernism in Indian literature by Umashankar Joshi; another on east-west connections and the west's impact on Indian literature by Annadashankar Ray; and four essays focused on theatre and drama, of which two dealt with the west and two with India. It is to be noticed that the essays from each of the areas were again carefully split into two timeframes, one classical and one modern. Of the two essays dealing with western drama, one was on Moliere's plays and the other on Greek theatre. The Indian counterpart had one essay on Rabindranath Tagore as a playwright and another on the aesthetics of ancient Indian drama. Along with these essays, the first section also carried Rabindranath Tagore's English translation of his poem 'Bharattirtha' and Nehru's broadcast as the Chancellor of Visva Bharati on All India Radio on May 8, 1958, on the occasion of Tagore's 97th birth anniversary. Apart from the careful division of focus on subject areas, the two essays by Umashankar Joshi and Annadashankar Ray require special attention here. Joshi's essay on modernism in India tries to locate the advent of modernism in Indian literature in a pan-Indian context. He talks about the impact of historical events and ideologies on India and their eventual influence on literature. On the other hand, Annadashankar Ray's essay deals with the question of inter-cultural transactions and their influence on literature. This issue of the journal too has a section dedicated to the recent developments in various languages of its concern, but with a special focus on drama this time.

The third issue (volume 2, number 1, October 1958–March 1959) coincided with the celebration of Kalidasa Jayanti to commemorate the eminent classical poet. This issue opens with Tagore's translation of his two poems on Kalidasa, namely, Ritusanghar and Meghdut. What follows Tagore's poems is a translation titled 'The City Beautiful' of Master Zinda Kaul, an eminent Kashmiri poet's poem. The editor's note points to the interesting influence of Tagore's poem 'Chitta jetha bhoysahunyo...' from Gitanjali. This is followed by an excerpt of Tagore's letter to his niece Indiradevi that talks about the genesis of Gitanjali and an essay titled 'Tagore's Poetry' written by Humayun Kabir. A part of this section has been dedicated to the famous Tamil poet, C. Subramania Bharati, consisting of translations of three of his poems and a critical essay titled 'Bharati's Poems' by R. P. Sethu Pillai. Ralph Rusell's essay titled 'An Eighteenth-Century Urdu Satirist (Sauda, c. 1713–1780)' and A. A. A. Fyzee's essay titled 'On Translating Ghalib' have also been included in this section. Kalindicharan Panigrahi's critical analysis of Chhama Athaguntha is also part of this

section. Two important pieces of the section are dedicated to the important Bengali writer Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee: a translation of his short story 'The Fulfilment of a Vow' and a translation of the introduction to a collection of short stories by Prabhat Kumar Mukherjee written by another very important Bengali literary figure, Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay, a collection commissioned by the Sahitya Akademi that was to be published in multiple Indian languages. Two pieces are dedicated to world literature, one on Lyudmil Stoyanov, a writer from the Soviet Union, and a translation of a section of Stoyanov. A reportage on the conference of Asian and African writers held in Tashkent by Krishnalal Shridharani is also part of this section. Finally, like the previous issues, a section has been dedicated to reviews of contemporary Indian literature in the languages of the academy.

The following two issues of 1959 focus heavily on translations from several Indian languages. The fourth issue includes translations from diverse authors, covering most of the country geographically, along with two critical essays on two extremely important literary works: an essay on Bibhutibhushan Bandyopadhyay's *Aranyak* written by Sunitikumar Chatterji, an essay on T. S. Pillai's *Ranitagazhi* written by K. M. Panikkar, and Victorio Ocampo's reminiscences of Tagore visiting South America. Instead of the section on reviews of contemporary literature, this issue has a section on reviews of the books that were awarded the Sahitya Akademi awards in different languages. The fifth issue also carries a number of translations from various Indian languages to English, along with a few critical essays, of which some deal specifically with components of Indian literature, like M. U. Malkani's essay on the works of Shah Abdul Latif, and some deal with components of world literature, like, Nyugen Khac Kham's essay titled 'Contribution of Indian Civilization to Vietnamese Culture'. The issue again has a section on the review of contemporary literatures of Indian languages that are recognised by the academy.

### **The Question of 'Comparativeness'**

The introduction of Comparative Indian Literature as a specific orientation and as an academic discipline required a methodological framework and its scope of study to be defined. While this methodological framework is not rigid, it definitely embodies a set of ethos that we may look at as 'comparativeness'. Sisir Kumar Das has argued for the necessity and inevitability of Comparative Indian Literature, elaborating on the fact that Indian literature provides a solid ground for comparative literary studies. Das is of the opinion that Comparative Literature has to be practised for the sake of literary studies in India; it is the most inclusive approach to look at Indian literature. His idea of Indian literature is directly connected with the method of study: Das talks about looking at Indian literature as a complex of literary relations, and any study on Indian literature should reflect that. The



practise of Comparative Indian Literature should not be an inquiry into unity alone but should be a study of diversity. Other practitioners and proponents of Comparative Indian Literature have had their own opinions and formulations regarding the method and object of study (Das, 95). However, the central question that has guided all these arguments and theorizations is the question of literary relations between the literatures of different Indian languages. Besides, affinity towards knowing the other, going beyond the barriers of languages, reading and practising translations, and taking a non-hierarchical approach to literary history are some of the basic yet crucial concerns.

Before going on to discuss about the treatment of the unity-diversity question in the Sahitya Akademi's literary endeavours, it would be interesting to note how the formation and preliminary structure of the academy were consciously done so as to not prioritise Hindi over any other language. Nehru's response to Ravi Shukla, who complained that the Sahitya Akademi had failed to pay special attention to Hindi, also needs to be taken note of. Nehru wrote:

"You say in your address that the Sahitya Akademi does not pay particular attention to Hindi as an all India language and is meant to spread out its activities over all the Indian languages. That is partly correct... Any such Akademi dealing with all India must necessarily take into consideration all our literature and principal language." (Quoted in Husain)

From the very calculated move regarding the representation of universities to Nehru's response to Ravi Shankar Shukla, to the decisions of the language policy taken up by the academy soon after its establishment to include English, Sindhi, and Maithili, these are indicative of the academy's effort to give equal importance to the languages.

The initial publication projects all had a primary focus — to make readers of one Indian language aware of other literatures from India. The National Bibliography of Indian Literatures, Who's Who of Indian Writers, or the history of literature series undeniably fit into the state's vision of unifying the literary communities across India and are limited to less than twenty languages in a country of hundreds of languages, but it would be difficult to say that these promoted any sort of direct cultural homogenization. Krishna Kripalani's guidelines to the authors of the history of literature series aim to adopt a uniform approach in handling a diverse range of literatures but also recognise inter-literary transactions and receptions.

The journal of the academy, although called Indian Literature, does not restrict its object of study just to the components of Indian literatures. One would be reminded of the answer of the practitioner of Comparative Indian Literature to a general apprehension about limiting one's scope of study in Comparative Indian Literature while Comparative Literature itself has endless possibilities in

terms of object of study. The Indian comparatist argues in favour of putting Indian literature in focus because that should be the primary focus of literary studies in India; that would not restrict the object of study to components of Indian literature. Literary transactions with cultures outside India form a major concern of the study. The contents of the journal are carefully divided to give importance to all literary periods, to various genres, and to all languages. Translations of major writers in the languages that the academy dealt with reaffirm its effort to spread information and literature from one Indian language to readers of another. The essays or editorial notes published are cognizant of influences and reception.

This paper has tried to look into the various understandings and implications of 'Indian literature' that the practitioners of comparative literature were talking about and the ideas that were propagated by the academy. It has then traced the formation of the Sahitya Akademi, its vision, the preliminary publications, and the writings published in its journal, Indian Literature, to understand the dominant trends of literary criticism that it upholds and further tried to understand how the Sahitya Akademi had been navigating through the idea of Indian literature that it initially spoke about. This has finally helped us to arrive at the preliminary question, that is, if there is a possibility of 'comparativeness' inherent in the literary pursuits of the Sahitya Akademi. 'Comparativeness' here is to be seen as a general tendency towards the idea of comparative literature as opposed to a single literature and would refer not to the conformation to a rigid theoretical structure of the discipline but to a tendency to go beyond linguistic boundaries. An analysis of the activities of the Sahitya Akademi and a detailed indexing of the issues of Indian literature published till 1959, that is, till the end of the decade in which the Sahitya Akademi was established, has been looked at as indicative of the Akademi's initial vision and as an adherence to the ideological framework of the Indian state. While Radhakrishnan talks about Indian literature being one, though written in different languages, and has emphasised on the question of unity in one of the 'Foreword' to *Contemporary Indian Literature*, it is the difference that gets highlighted more than an over-imposed oneness.

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