Role of Translation in Comparative Literature

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In today’s world this subject is getting more and more popularity. There are many reasons behind it. The first and the foremost reason is that it contributes to the unity of nations. It also encourages mutual understanding, broad-mindedness, cultural dialogues and intertextuality. But one can hardly think of comparative literature without immediate thinking of translation. For instance most readers in India know the works of Goethe, Tolstoy, Balzac, Shakespeare and Gorky only through translation. It is through the intermediary of translator that we get access to other literatures.

Thus Comparative Literature and translation humanize relationship between people and nations. As an intermediary between languages, thoughts and cultures, they contribute to the respect of difference and alterability. Moreover, they unite the self and the other in their truths, myths, force and weakness. From a historical perspective, comparative literature and translation have always been complementary. Without the help of translation a normal person who usually knows two or three languages would never have known the universal masterpieces of Dante, Shakespeare, Borges, Kalidas, and Cervantes etc. A normal person usually not knows more than two-three languages. But if s/he wanted to study and compare the literature of two or more languages s/he must be familiar with those languages and cultures. If s/he does not know any of that particular language s/he can take help of translation. Those texts might be translated by someone else who knows that language and the comparatist can use that translated text to solve his/her purpose. So we can say that:

1. Both comparative literature and translation are inter-linked.
2. A layman can come closer to the major writers of different fields.
3. Through the translation of literature from different languages we can understand their philosophy, sociology, psychology and above all their culture.
4. Either translation or through comparison the problems of particular area’s people will analyzed.

5. With the help of translation a text become able to get a wider range of readers.

Comparative literature is a discipline dedicated to the study of literature without national and linguistic barriers. The student of comparative literature study problems in genre, mode, literary period or movement. The comparatists probe the mechanics of literary forms and engage themselves in the analysis of existing theoretical and critical approaches and the formulation of necessary critical distinctions of equal importance. The comparatists also deal with the questions of interaction between literature and other arts and disciplines. The comparatists study the political, social and an intellectual context of literary emphasis is preserved. In other words, the main objective of the study of comparative literature is the proper appreciation of literature in a larger perspective, involving more than one literature and specially those growing across the national boundaries. In a multilingual country like ours we have two basic objectives for studying comparative literature.

No doubt the role of translation in comparative literature is very important. It becomes more valuable in today’s world when the whole world has become a global village. With the advancement of technology people living in different countries with different languages come closer to each other. Although there is a one international language, English, which is the common source of communication between people but still there is a problem in the study of literature as literatures is usually written in regional languages or languages of that particular countries such as France’s literature is in French and literature of Russia is in Russian language. It is not compulsory that every comparatist will know the all languages. So there is need of translation by which a comparatist can read and understand that literary works which are not in his/her own language. With the help of translation we become familiar with the customs, dress code, and culture of other countries.

In short it can be said that translation plays a great role in comparative literature. We can even say that comparative study of literatures from different languages, cultures and socio-cultural backgrounds is not possible. So translation occupies a special place in comparative literature. In this age of globalization comparative literature as a subject is getting more and more popularity. But there is no one who is perfect in all the languages. So translation has
played a very important role to understand the literature & culture of different languages without which we cannot do a comparative study of various literary works written in different languages. So Comparative literature is a tree with translation as its most important branch.