

EDITORIAL

In India Comparative Literature was talked of first in 1907 by Rabindranath Tagore in a lecture at the National Council of Education, Calcutta and was founded as an independent academic discipline by late Professor Budhadev Bose in 1956 at Jadavpur University. Much ink has been spent since then about the nature, function, possibility, practicality, and future etc. of this subject. Drastic criticisms have been made by sceptics ; students have been discouraged by professorial harangues, and even its very existence has been sneered at by the traditionalists. But in spite of all this the progress and prosperity of this discipline in the United States, Western Germany and France have been quite amazing during the last few decades, whereas in India it has received no encouraging response. The reason is obvious : even after three decades of our political freedom, we have not been freed from the colonial attitude that attached immense prestige to the study of English literature in exclusion even of our own national and regional literatures. In the recent years, when a decrease in the market-value of English literary studies is realised, stress is shifted to a compensating study of English language through the methods of Applied Linguistics. We do not deny, of course, the importance of English language ; we should not be rather fools to ignore a language which is now a window for the thoughts and activities of the whole world. But our submission is — why should language be stressed at the cost of literature ? and again, why should English literature be stressed at the cost of other masterpieces of the western world ? English was introduced in our universities not because it is the best of all the literatures of the western world, but because it was the language of the rulers and by studying it and by loving it one was to be graced by the ruler. But why should we adore English literature now as we used to do then even knowing that there are much better things all around ? Why should we, for example, sacrifice Dante for Pope, or Goethe for Byron, or Tolstoy for Jane Austen ? Admitting that problems will arise as to the reading of the texts in original or in translations we may go for the latter because when learning of so many languages will be difficult for a student, translations will not debar him from experiencing the very essence of a poet. And, in fact, persons like Matthew Arnold, Andre Gide, Yeats, Shaw and Thomas Mann could write authentically on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Tagore and Ibsen without knowing a

single word in Russian, Bengali or Norwegian. We do not say that a knowledge in the originals is unnecessary ; it is very much necessary, almost inevitable for a scholar specialising in them. But what urgency of it in case of a sensitive man interested in literature in general ?

Comparative Literature, for us, means simply the comparative method of studying literature. "No poet, no artist of any art," to quote T. S. Eliot, "has his complete meaning, alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone ; you must set him, for contrast and comparison among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism." Though Eliot means here the comparison of an individual poet with his own tradition, we can safely expand the meaning of 'own' much beyond English or European or Western to include the entire humanity. World was never perhaps so big as today, and a poet alive or dead, Indian or English, Japanese or African, American or Russian, Oriental or Occidental, has to face this comparison with the tradition of the whole world, of the whole humanity as a nation, to pass successfully the test of poetic excellences. Thus the method is as old as the art of appreciation itself though its scope is widened immensely and rightly.

Further, as there is nothing as 'pure' art or literature, or 'pure' literary criticism or art-criticism, because thoughts and feelings do not obey the academic disciplines by segregation of learning, appreciation of art and literature must get related to its various allied fields, especially metaphysics, morals, religion, linguistics, patterns and history of culture, social behaviour and psychology. One may successfully undergo a course in "pure literature" but any higher thinking or speculation in "pure literature" is certainly meaningless. This was nothing new to an Aristotle or to an Abhinavagupta, neither to a Mammaṭa nor to a Viśvanātha ; but we 'discover' it from the century-old ruins of our job-oriented, segregated learning, and a "discovery" like this has led to the foundation of the Vishvanatha Kaviraja Institute. To our knowledge, this is the first Indian institution aiming at interdisciplinary pursuit of knowledge in Humanities or cultural sciences ; and we hope, *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (JCLA), the mirror of this Institute, will reflect its soul honestly.