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**LITERARY INFLUENCE: A PIVOTAL ASPECT IN THE DOMAIN
OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE**

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Literary influence is a basic aspect in Comparative Literature studies. Influence study attempts to trace the influence of a writer. It is an important branch of Comparative Literature which is an academic field dealing with the study of literature and cultural expression across linguistic, national, geographic and disciplinary boundaries. However, the influence of a writer or set of writers upon another is studied in the domain of theme, idea, attitude, technique etc. It is a fruitful study as it can throw light upon a writer's individual talent or it can unmask a plagiarist. Influence study is by the degree of influence; either direct or indirect, conscious or unconscious, strong or weak. According to S.S. Praver, there can be four principal types of influence studies such as study of direct borrowing, study of the conflux of impulses from various literatures or writers, study of Literatures in contact and study of influence of ideas.

The mode of influence can be classified into adaptation, pastiche, stylisation, burlesque, parody, plagiarism, negative influence, false influence and creative Treason. Adaptation involves translation of works in a foreign language and covers a wide range from conventional reworking of a foreign model to a commercial attempt at turning a foreign work to suit the local taste. Pastiche imitates a particular poet or movement for artistic purpose. Burlesque is a comic element where a particular style is ridiculed through comic distortion. Parody aims to ridicule a literary model through imitation. There is 'stylization' that aims at the style of a single writer, a whole movement, or even an entire period. For the sake of artistic purpose, an author displays a combination of style and materials in his work. It is the emergence of new trends and beliefs within the framework of national literature, inspired by foreign models, as protest against the existing artistic theories and practices. Parody and travesty, as creative genres, pave the way for such negative influences which is possible when the native authors imitate one another. Plagiarism is a bad

example of influence as it stealthily copies quotations without giving the reference to the source. Negative influence is a term coined by Anna Balakian. It denotes an instance where a work is written as an antidote to the bad influence of an earlier work. Example is Shaw's *St. Joan* was a corrective influence to rectify the tarnished image of Joan projected by Shakespeare in England and Schiller in Germany. 'Creative treason' refers to the misreading of a literary work, especially a translated work. Example is *Gulliver's Travels* regarded as a children's book and *Alice in Wonderland* as an adult book.

Three schools of Comparative Literature determine the mode of influence study: the French School of Comparativism, the American school of Comparativism and the Russian school of Comparativism. These three schools promoted Comparative Literature. The French school combined in itself historicism and positivism under French Comparatists like Jean-Marie Carre, Rene Etiemble, Paul Van Tieghem and Fernand Baldensperger. In America Comparative Literature developed in a progressive manner as various Colleges and Universities provided the basis for Comparative Literature. The leading Comparatists are H.H. Remak, Harry Levin, Francois Jost and Arthur Kunst. The philosophy of communism in Russia provided fertile soil for the growth of Comparative Literature. The leading Russian comparatists are Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Boris Eichenbaum, Yury Tynyanov and Zhirmunsky. Comparative Literature was established in France in the second half of the 19th Century. The French preferred narrow positive studies. The Americans adopted a broad approach to Comparative literature. The French scholars gave importance to the essence of literature.

An important trend of the French school of comparativism is literary history as per the comparative perspective where an author is focused on as well as his work. The survival of comparative literature in France was as comparative and general literature. The text is the centre of its research which keeps in mind the aspects of intertextuality, context and history. French School of Comparative Literature became important by not designating itself to one language or nationality but presenting a general orientation to the subject matter.

The main focus was on solid research before interpretations were made. It was a chronological and systematic approach. The study of 'influence' about the originality of the source or the author's influence which created his work was replaced gradually by 'reception' study which centred on reaction, opinion, orientation, critique etc. and thus shifted from being author-centric to reader-centric. It was not the emitter focused but the receptor. Reception study gauged the response to a writer's work. According to Anna Balakian, the search for influence should be analytical - a study in depth, microscopic and precise. Influence study presupposes a direct casual relationship between the emitter and the receiver while analogy study is concerned with the investigation of two authors or works without necessarily implying a direct casual relationship between them.

The French critic, Marius-Francois Guyard regards influence as a part of 'the fortunes' of authors. 'Reception' and 'fortune' of a foreign writer are interchangeable terms and the reception and popularity of a writer usually prepares the ground or accounts for his deeper impact on a national Literature. Ulrich Weisstein poses the question whether and to what extent literary form of appropriation exists. In terms of their mutual interdependence one can define 'influence' as unconscious imitation and imitation as direct influence. With influence studies the question of direct and indirect influence is a complex problem. A native author may introduce the influence of a foreign tradition and it may thereafter proceed from the impact of him to the other native writer. The theory of imitation is considered as an extension of the theory of influence. Associated with the concept of imitations are many terms like Plagiarism, adaptations, burlesque, pastiche and parody; many earlier

twentieth century novels are acknowledged adaptations of George Reynolds' works. Many are under the misconception that translation is a separate entity. Translation comes under influences, as it serves as the best intermediary between any two Literatures. It plays an important role in the process of influence. In fact, Translation itself is claimed to be a creative art: transcreation. It is through translations that the achievement of one country is made available to the rest of the world. Thus translation can open new lanes in the literary world traffic. The August Schlegel –Ludwig Tieck translation, for example, transformed Shakespeare into a German classical poet.

The harmonious and judicious fusion of originality and influence from diverse models result in creative innovation. Thus the study of influence upon an author, his work or literature ensures a better understanding of a finished work. The centre of interest, however, should be what the borrowing or influenced author does with that what he takes and what effect it has upon the finished literary work. Weisstein makes two preliminary observation. One is that the study of influences within a national literature or between two national literatures is not a qualitative one; it is methodological one. The other is that as a matter of principle, the function of intermediaries or transmitters such as translators, books, journals, reviewers which are supposed to link the emitter and the receiver will be partially ignored.

Thematology is another aspect that deals with the contrastive study of themes in different literary texts. Thematology is primarily concerned with subject matter or content of literature. Though it literally means the study of themes, it actually covers several aspects like, situation, type, motif, topos etc. Thematic study is one of the logical and traditional ways of comparing authors and literatures. The thematological categories such as 'themes', 'motifs' and 'types' have transcended their barriers and now have acquired universal acknowledgement. The reason for the choice of certain modes and themes by the writers may be found out by making a comparative study of them. A theme is an avenue for progression of ideas, whose entrance into Literature, it invites and facilitates. This helps us in making enquiry into the permutations and adventure into the history of ideas. Van Tieghem assigns thematology the task of determining not only the dependence of more recent authors upon their predecessors, but also the role played by their own genres, their ideal and their art and the variations they have played on the common theme. Thematic Studies, therefore, are mainly as well as intimately connected with the study of literary style and literary genres.

W.B. Yeats and Jibanananda Das are two great poets, one being an English language poet and the other, a Bengali language poet. A comparative study of poems of both poets offers the impression of the former being the influencing writer, the latter the influenced one. Both poets were lover of Nature. Folktales and history constitute the focal points of their poetry. Both were inspired by the French symbolists more or less. Das was a voracious reader of English literature and was a college teacher of English. In all possibilities, Das went through the poetic works of Yeats. Das himself made occasional references to Yeats in his treatise, *Kobitar Kotha*. Certain poems of Das remind the readers of Yeats' poems. But the wonderful aspect of Das' poems is that though they show the poetic glimpses of Yeats, they exhibit an added charm and meaning that testify to the individualistic traits of Das as a separate entity and as a great poet.

Das belonged to a period when Tagore was still casting his long shadow in the realm of Bengali literature. In order to respond to his inner psyche and to conform to the prevailing trend of modernist poetry simultaneously, Das had to eschew the dominant impact of Tagore and had to look for English and French poets for the models of his poetry. This creative transmutation employed by Das makes it difficult to curve out a thorough analogy between his poems and Yeats. Das is a poet influenced, to whatever extent, by Yeats; but he is such an original poet that he cannot

be called an imitator of Yeats. Das, by means of the sense of history and time, coupled with the profound understanding of human nature, makes the creative transmutation of the idea, more or less, of the predecessor conforming to the native setting and climate, keeping the individuality intact. His awareness of folklores and native rural setting provides his poems a familiar sense of sound and smell drawing a sense of involvement among readers. His poem, Aabar Asibo Phire (When I Return) masterly evokes an attachment:

When I return to the banks of the Dhansiri, to this Bengal,
 Not as a man, perhaps, but as a salik bird or white hawk,
 Perhaps as a dawn crow in this land of autumn's new harvest,
 I'll float upon the breaths of fog one day in the shade of a jackfruit tree.

(Translated by Clinton B. Seely)

In view of Yeats and Jibanananda Das' poetic credentials, Bloom's book, 'The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry' that offers the theory of creativity with a theory of the dynamic of poetic history can be discussed here. The principal idea reflected in 'The Anxiety of Influence' is that a poet wants to begin to create though at first he feels threatened and anxious that a stronger, precursor poet has already said what he wanted to say before he had the chance to say it himself. Bloom feels that an author's literary debts spoil the originality of a poet. There is one of Bloom's central principles: Poetic Influence; when it involves two strong, authentic poets, it always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation. The history of fruitful poetic influence, which is to say the main traditions of Western poetry since the Renaissance, is a history of anxiety and self-saving caricature of distortion, of perverse, wilful revisionism without which modern poetry as such could not exist. Bloom believes that all writers are influenced by the writers who came before them and left a lasting mark on the history and development of the poetic form. These relationships between poets, Bloom defines as intra-poetic relationships. While this may be the case, however, Bloom also draws a distinction between the failed poet and the strong poet. Although profoundly influenced by his precursors, the strong poet refuses to repeat or imitate influential works completely. Instead, he looks to influential poets for his own place to be original. The failed poet is one who has failed in his attempt to attain originality as a result of outright imitation of the works of his precursors.

On the other hand, J. T. Shaw maintains that originality consists chiefly in the genuineness and effectiveness of the artistic and creative power of the literary work, not in the innovation. J.T. Shaw in his 'Literary Indebtedness and Comparative Literary Studies' records, "Literary influence appears to be most frequent and most fruitful at the times of emergence of national literatures and of radical change of direction of a particular literary tradition in a given literature ... In the case of emerging national literatures, authors may seek in form or ideology that which they can adapt or transmute for their own consciousness, time and nation" (Stallknecht and Frenz 66). Poet Das produces an artistic and aesthetic effect upon readers, his literary debts to Yeats notwithstanding. He succeeds to subordinate his borrowings to the aura his creative art produces stamping his originality, thanks to his creative power of imagination and his sense of history and time which find their realization through the sublime implementation of literary tools such as images, similes, archetypes, metaphors etc.

Yeats is a poet par excellence, who writes in English. Das, on the other hand, is a poet who writes in Bengali. The diction and the style of both poets are different. One is influenced chiefly by

symbolist movement, the other by surrealist movement. J. T. Shaw observes, “The question of the influence of literary diction and style across languages has hitherto been perhaps insufficiently studied” (Stallknecht and Frenz 69). However, while Das has to borrow an idea in the form of a theme or an image from Yeats, his creative impulse reshapes phrase, metaphor, similes to fit them into the native literary tradition. Yeats’ imagery in the poem *He reproves the Curlew* is eye-catching and startling:

“O curlew, cry no more in the air,
Or only to the water in the west;
Because your crying brings to my mind
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair”

The crying of chil is likened to the fruit of a reed, which is rare to view. Its crying near the river Dhansiri offers a mysterious aura. Yeats’ ‘passion- dimmed eyes’ turns to piercing the core of the heart for Das. The latter is more intense and penetrating. In this way, Das takes an idea and infuses it with a vivid trademark conforming to the natural surroundings. His individualistic trait stands out. His creativity comes to light.

The impact of Yeats on Das is a creative and productive one. On reading identical themes the readers of Yeats are likely to sense an added freshness even in reading of Das. J. T. Shaw elucidates, “The seed of literary influence must fall on fallow land. The author and the tradition must be ready to accept, transmute, react to the influence. Many seeds from various possible influences may fall, but only the ones for which the soil is ready will germinate, and each will be affected by the particular quality of the soil and climate where it takes root or to shift the image, to the shoot to which it is grafted” (Stallknecht and Frenz 66).

In the process, the influence of Yeats on Das culminates in a comparative analysis of two poets cutting across the geographical territory and varied cultures and settings thereby bringing about a different aesthetic and creative taste. It is apt to quote in this context: “The influence upon an author or a literature should be studied, for understanding both. Such studies should take into account what qualities were taken, what were transmuted, what were rejected. The centre of interest should be what the borrowing or influenced author does with what it has upon the finished literary work” (Stallknecht and Frenz 71).

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