CHAPTER – I

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Comparative literature involves two literatures. It transports literary materials from one language to another. The scope of this literature is broader than that of single literatures and even national literatures. It transcends the narrowness, provinciality and parochialism of national and general literatures. Hence it broadens the horizon of literatures all over the world and gives us a cosmopolitan view and develops international outlook. Bijay kumar Das defines comparative literature as “it is a comparison between two literatures and does not have an independent status. Comparative literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures.” (1)

Rene Wellek and Austin Warrren have rightly drawn our attention to the origin of ‘comparative’ literature in the following words:

Matthew Arnold translating Ampere’s use of ‘histoirecomparative’, was apparently the first to use the term in English(1848). ................. the formal comparison between literatures-or even in movements, figures, and works-is rarely a central theme in literary history, though such a book as F.C Green’s Minuet, comparing aspects of French and English eighteen.
century literature, may be illuminating in defining not only parallels and affinities but also divergences between the literary development of one nation and that of another.” (46)

Comparative literature is a study in terms of comparison and contrasts of similarities and dissimilarities of literatures and cultures and countries more than one in order to contribute to the mutual appreciation of literary experiences of various people. A comparative study of literature transcends national and regional boundaries. It reveals common approaches and similarities in ideas, irrespective of time, land and language. It helps in promoting understanding among the people living in different parts of the country and speaking different languages by fostering national unity. Henry H.H. Remak, an eminent American comparatist defines the term comparative literature as “the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between English literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, social sciences (e.g. politics, economics, sociology), religion , etc., on the other”(ed. Subramaniam, N: I)

As Rene Wellek says that the comparative method is common to all types of literary study and the comparatist does not stop with comparison. He analyses, evaluates, explicates and theorises. Comparative literature, says he, “will study all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creation and experience”. (Wellek: 19)
According to R.K Dhavan the term comparative literature means “any literary work that compares.” Such a comparison could be in terms of structure, style or the philosophic vision. A study in comparative literature ought to lead us to a more comprehensive and adequate understanding of the works and their authors. Mainly it seeks to study interactions between literatures written in various countries in various languages. Comparative literature is a literary discipline and ought to be recognized as the most important academic activity of the present era, in which the East and the West are merging and unifying the world into a single whole.

According to V. Sachithanandan, “Comparative literature, as it is practised today, is an interdisciplinary subject, a comprehensive study of literature transcending national and regional boundaries.” (1)

R. Mummatchi says that the object of comparative literature is essentially the study of diverse literatures in their relations with one another. 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 personal experience. The roots and inspiration of various literatures have been much the same and the mental climate in which they have grown up has been similar. (4)

Comparative studies helps in discovering and establishing the universals within the structure of human imagination. K. Chellappan says, “Comparative literature would not only lead to an enhancement of literary appreciation and evaluation but also to the
discovery of a universal theory of literature. The comparative method as a method of studying literature brings out the unity in diversity.” (75)

Dr. T.P. Meenakshisundaram talks of “the delight and enlightenment provided by a comparative study of great writers who transcend the local and the temporal, grasp and vivify human life in all its complexity and thus appeal to men of all times and climes.(v-vi)

Max Mueller said: “All higher knowledge is gained by comparison, and rests on comparison.” R.S. Pathak says:

Comparative studies can be of immense value in imparting what Bosanquet calls ‘training in enjoyment’ and in freeing the mind from the shackles of provincialism and literary myopia. Such studies will bring back the uninterrupt ed perspective which is so essential for literary study and research of wide dimensions

(Dhavan. R.K. : 27)

Comparative literature, says V. Sachithanandan, “aims at liberating literature from narrow linguistic boundaries, tries to unify the literatures of the world into one organic whole and thus intends to establish the unity of humanity.” (1)

R.S. Pathak says: “Probably, no other country can afford a better opportunity for comparative studies than India. India has been a multilingual country night from the beginning. This linguistic multiplicity resulted in a wonderfully rich and varied literary heritage. (Dhavan R.K.: 31)

In the present context the term Comparative Literature is confined to English-Tamil literary relations inaugurated by the publication of ‘The Impact of Western
Thought on Bharati' (1972) published by Annamalai University under the guidance of Meenakshi Sundaram, the multilingual scholar.

With a hope that comparative literature builds bridges across the countries, this thesis makes an attempt of comparing Scott with Kalki as historical novelists. Both of them were men of letters who distinguished themselves as historical novelists. Like Scott Kalki was a dignified personality. Both of them were great thinkers and great writers who evinced keen interest in the cultural heritage of their respective countries. Like Scott Kalki was a great adventurer. Both of them were known for their patriotic zeal. According to Seccombe, “No one has ever made his own land more beautiful or more blewed than Sir Walter Scott”. This statement of Seccombe may be fairly applicable to Kalki also. Both of them were voracious readers of legends. Scott’s familiarity with the Scottish landscape and social life is similar to Kalki’s familiarity with the landscape of Tamil Nadu and social life. Their patriotic fervour and spirit of adventure in addition to their historical knowledge and human psychology and their abundant interest in the past glory of their respective nations prompted them to produce world-class historical novels. Age cannot wither the charm of their novels nor custom stale their infinite variety.

According to S. Thothadri there are only a few similarities between Scott and Kalki as historical novelists but there are vital differences between them. He says that Scott and Kalki are poles apart in their approach to life and literature. Their attitude to history is strikingly different. Scott has definite views about the historical novel but Kalki has none. Scott believes that the historical novel should deal with the customs and manners of the
people but Kalki has a negative attitude in the sense that a novelist should write independently without preconceived notions. Scott is a realist whereas Kalki is an idealist and a romanticist. Scott’s novels reflect the class struggles inherent in the social structure. Kalki denies their basic concept and chooses to portray only kings and princes. In general Kalki lacks the stark realism of Scott. His historical novels take the readers to a dream-world. (Thothadri S.:1-14)

Thothadri’s criticism on the comparative study of Scott and Kalki is polemical in nature. Thothadri seems to be unaware of the fundamental principles of comparative literature.

According to G.J. Samuel comparative literature takes into account not only similarities but also dissimilarities. Besides, the social milieu of these two writers (Scott and Kalki) are more or less the same; both have written historical novels and both are by nature romantic. Hence it is absolutely wrong to come to a hasty conclusion that certain writers should not be compared with certain other writers since their social outlook slightly differ.

Another Marxist critic K. Kailasapathy does not approve of the comparison between Kalki and Scott. He distinguishes novel from romance and argues that Scott has written historical ‘novels’ and Kalki has written ‘romances’. Scott is unique as a realist; Kalki detests realism. He suggests patronizingly that it would be appropriate to compare Kalki with Walpole (Tamil Naval Ilakkiyam.:115)
A superficial reading of Scott and Kalki and Marxist parochialism account for this biased criticism and hasty conclusion. Scott and Kalki as historical novelists blend the features of romance with novel. As Alexander Welsh remarks, romance stresses incident and novel, character, (The Hero of the Waverly Novels: 14) Scott defines romance in the essay on “Romance” contributed to the Encyclopaedia Britannica as “fictitious narrative in prose and verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents,” and defines the novel as “a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society” (qtd. Ioan Williams, Sir Walter Scott on Novelists and Fiction: 1) Even though Northrop Fry regards the romance and the novel as two forms of fiction he admits that pure examples of either form are never found. So there is hardly any modern romance that could not be made out to be a novel and vice versa.

Romance and novel are the part and parcel of the historical novel of Kalki and Scott. Both of them are the masters of the art of blending romance with history and facts with fiction. So, there is enough justification for comparing Scott with Kalki as great historical novelists.

Kalki wrote three major historical novels namely P.K., C.C. and P.C., Even though they are in novel form they are epic in nature. They deal with the Pallavas and Cōlas who ruled over Tamil Nadu during the seventh and tenth centuries respectively. Kalki’s is indepth analysis of history, politics and art and culture of Tamil Nadu during that period is indeed remarkable. It was an age of Hindu religious revival. According to K.V. Rangaswami “C.C. will be acclaimed, even on a superficial study, as a brilliant historical
romance... So judged, a permanent place will be accorded to it in Tamil prose literature.” (C.C. Introduction : xxvii)

Kalki depicts the ages of Cōlas and Pallavas in a realistic manner reflecting the people’s customs, arts, painting, music, dance and tradition as if talking about the people of his own time like Scott. P.K. (Dream of Parthipan) is the first of a trilogy, which covers the reign of Naracimma Pallavan. The narrative revolves around the struggle of the Pallava Emperor to enhance the prestige of the Tamil flag. Known for his patronage of the arts, Naracimma Pallavan took great interest in creating the remarkable shore town of Mamallapuram, with its famous shore temple and the monolithic Rathas. He restored to Hinduism its elements of love and compassion. He succeeded in wiping out the extremist cult of Saivism, which believed in human sacrifice. In P.K. these historic facts are woven around a remarkable narrative, filled with thrill, suspense and romance.

(Venkataraman, M.S. P.K.)

P.C. is Kalki’s majestic historical romance-a masterfully woven epic of fact and conjecture set against the backdrop of tenth century peninsular India under the Chozha kings. The setting is brought to life with unforgettable descriptions of the corruptions of high office, its acceptance or rejection, the political ambitions and personal motives of the rulers, and their impact on the ruled. (Karthick Narayanan. C.V., P.C.)

Kalki’s historical novels were first serialized in his journal Kalki before they were published in book form.
P.K. was serialized from October 16, 1941 to February 10, 1943.

C.C. was serialized from January 1, 1944 to June 30, 1946.

P.C. was begun on October 29, 1950 and concluded on May 16, 1954.

The Tamil Nadu Government has made the writings of Kalki a national property.

The selected novels of Scott namely I., K., W., H.M, and B.L., deal with the history of England and Scotland. I and K deal with the Middle Age and the Elizabeth Age respectively whereas W., H.M, and B.L., deal with the eighteenth century of Scotland.

Scott’s first novel W (1814) deals with the Jacobite rising of 1745. “It is a period to which no Briton can look back without the strongest emotions and the most anxious interest” (The British Critic, N.S. ii, 1814, p.190). Scott has able to formulate the background from the memories of the living people whom he has met in Scotland. These typical English elements with Jacobitism, the last medieval movements, in Europe, became the main theme and the most Scottish element in his whole work. He used it over and over again in Guy Mannering (1815); The Antiquary (1816); Old Mortality (1816); The Heart of Midlothian (1818); and Rob Roy (1818).

“W has claims also to be called the first political novel” (Lamont, Claire W Introduction xv) because W shows us men in relation to the affairs of the nation.

H.M (1818) is one of the most artful of Scott’s romances. It deals mainly with Scotland and recreates a past epoch of Scottish history. Thomas Crawford regards this novel as a domestic ballad epic in prose. It impressively brings together three of Scott’s main recurring interests: Nationality, Religion, and Justice.
B.L (1819) is a tragic love story. It depicts the conflict between feudalism and modernism shortly after Scotland's Union with England in 1707 'in naked, almost melodramatic terms' (Daiches). According to Lockhart it is "the most pure and powerful of all tragedies that Scott ever 'penned'". It presents a panorama of Scottish life in the early eighteenth century. As the review in Blackwoods declared: 'It is the only true romance of the whole set: - in purpose, tenor, and conclusion – it is a pure and magnificent tragical romance' (qtd. 342). Tennyson regarded it as Scott's best novel. Emerson regarded it as Scott's highest achievement.

I (1820) is one of the most popular novels of Scott. Lockhart observes that the publication of I marks the most brilliant epoch in Scott's history as the literary favourite of his contemporaries (369) but he is not prepared to place it, "on the same level with W, Guy Mannening and H.M (368)

K another English novel "was an immediate success". (Ernest Rhys). It owes its immediate success to its brilliant evocation of the sixteenth century England, the masterly portrait of Queen Elizabeth and the tragic fate of Amy Robsart. Above all, it lays bare the moral depravity of man and his fierce struggle for power and influence which lie hidden under the glittering splendour of the merry England.

The novels that deal with the history of Scotland are considered to be more significant so far as Scott is concerned because Scott himself says in W: "There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, had undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland" (W. xxv. 340).