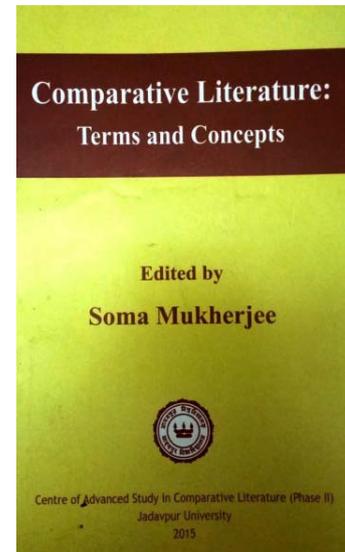


Comparative Literature – Terms and Conceptsby **Sreejit Datta**¹***Comparative Literature: Terms and Concepts***Ed. **Soma Mukherjee**.

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Comparative Literature (Phase II),
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Comparative Literature: Terms and Concepts is a key work of reference in the varied and complex field of comparative literary studies, edited by Dr Soma Mukherjee, who is an assistant professor at the Centre for Comparative Literature, Visva Bharati. The editor, the contributors, the Centre for Advanced Study in Comparative Literature (Phase II) and the Department all deserve to be greatly applauded for bringing this project to fruition. Such a handbook or glossary of annotated terms and key concepts dealing with the discipline of Comparative Literature has been long overdue. Its publication will no doubt be hailed by researchers, teachers and students of all levels from within and without the discipline; virtually anybody dealing with literary studies will be hugely benefited by this volume. It is a compact paperback, providing meticulous explanations for each of nearly sixty entries, familiarity with which is critical for a working knowledge of the discipline of Comparative Literature. Also, a researcher who wishes to work with any literary and/or cultural text, not necessarily taking the comparatist's approach, shall invariably find this handbook of terms and concepts related to literary studies in general and comparative literary studies in particular quite useful.

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The editor deserves a special round of applause for maintaining a pleasant and practical homogeneity of register used in the explanatory language, especially because a large number of contributors (a list of the contributors with their professional affiliations at the time of publication of the volume is provided at the very end of the book) have worked for bringing out this volume, and each of them have provided varying number of entries to it. The editing and proofing is almost flawless, there is hardly any typo that disturbs the flow of reading in any of the explanations. Each and every explanation has been very wisely followed up by a detailed list of reference works that would augment the reading of the user and enrich her understanding of the particular term or concept.

Coming to the introduction written by Dr. Mukherjee, it can be said that she has re-emphasized the necessity of taking up a comparative approach in ‘doing’ literary studies in the Indian context, a case that has been made time and again by Indian comparatists. That emphasis itself has been used by the editor as the justification for bringing out a glossary of terms and concepts from the discipline of Comparative Literature like the present one, and the sudden increase in the number of Comparative Literature departments across the country (especially in the central universities) greatly corroborates the idea. This project that has been described by the editor as “preliminary work” has no doubt been carried out with utmost care for the rationale and a logically composed structure that should go behind the creation of a work such as this. In the editor’s own words:

“This glossary attempts to explicate the terms used in the method of comparative literature and the concepts that define its field of inquiry. We have attempted to illustrate the processes, the applications of the method and the use of the tools so that the scholar of comparative Literature, as well as the scholar of literature in general may use it with profit.”
(p 6)

The practice of explaining the terms with illustrations from actual texts is maintained throughout the book in its many entries, and for that reason this effort is highly laudable. For example, it presents a sufficiently satisfactory explanation for ‘polygenesis’ (p 61), one of the essential concepts of Comparative Literature, using the two texts, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *Uttararamacharitam*. Polygenesis is a term for the phenomenon of occurrence of literary affinities in terms of themes and motifs between texts from such literary systems where one

cannot establish a direct contact or influence of cultures. The entry for this term in the present volume takes up the case of these two plays which are far removed from one another in terms of both time and space; and where a direct contact between cultures or influences upon each other can be ruled out with confidence. This particular entry explains the term while noticing the similarities: both Leontes and Rama abandon their wives; and in both cases the recognition of the wives by their respective husbands is preceded by the recognition and acceptance of their children. Such a practice of illustrating with actual texts leave hardly any doubt in the mind of the reader regarding the explanation of terms and concepts, especially the rather difficult and new ones. Such examples abound throughout the length of this volume. They add a holistic approach to its designated task of explicating terms and concepts in a glossary.

The editor expresses her hope that this volume will be of help to those scholars who set out to “understand and apply Comparative Literature methodology in order to look holistically at Indian literature,” (p 6) but we think that this will do great as a companion volume for those undergraduate and postgraduate students alike who have comparative literature as part of their university curricula. The lack of such a ready reference has been one of the reasons that created a baseless suspicion and anxiety in the minds of the younger Indian students of literary studies and liberal arts in general. This volume will serve the purpose of a ‘primer’ on comparative literature as well, since one gets to look at almost all the major concepts and tools of comparative literature at one go here. It can be hoped that this volume will, among the Indian students and general readership, help in the proliferation of awareness regarding what comparative literature is. It is highly important as the level of that awareness is pitifully low in the mentioned communities.

One of the very few cons of this immensely useful volume is the absence of a content page, which would have not been totally out of context since the number of entries is not too large to be put into a list and the explanations provided for them are adequately long and detailed. So the reader could go directly to the page number of a particular entry and that way locating one would have been easier. Other glossaries with alphabetically arranged terms and concepts related to any field of knowledge can afford to do away with a content page because they are usually huge in terms of sheer volume; even though entries of each letter of the alphabet could be easily provided side by side with the range of page numbers that they take

up. It will probably not be too much to expect that either the latter approach of content arrangement or a detailed list of all the entries and their respective locations in the volume in terms of page number would be appended at the beginning of this glossary in its next edition. Also, the aesthetic side of publishing has not been adequately taken care of in this volume, for there should have been adequate spacing between explanations/discussion on each entry and between different sections of the book, such as the introduction, the glossary and the bibliography. And last but not the least; we do expect more exciting, colourful and interesting cover design for a volume dealing with such an exciting discipline as Comparative Literature.