

The Evolution of the Idea of Comparative Literature Studies

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Abstract:

This course will provide you with an introduction to comparative literature, or more correctly, comparative literature studies, which is a relatively recent field of study in the field of literary appreciation. It will begin with a concise explanation of the development of the notion of comparative literature, and then it will proceed to analyze the significance of the concept in a country like India, which is both multilingual and multicultural. The themes, methodologies, and methods of research within the field of Indian comparative literature will finally be addressed in this work. Additionally, it will take a brief look at the supporting function that translation plays in the investigation of comparative Indian literature. When you have finished reading the lesson, you will have a greater understanding of the challenges that are seen in comparative literature studies.

Keywords: *Comparative Literature, American View, French View, Indian View.*

I. Introduction

The term "comparative literature" refers to the discipline of analyzing many works of literature in relation to one another. The link between literature, on the one hand, and other fields of knowledge and belief, and fine arts and cinema, on the other hand, is another aspect of this research that is being investigated. To put it another way, it is research that compares one piece of literature with another piece of literature, or with a topic that primarily pertains to the fields of the arts, social sciences, or the humanities. Comparatists are the academics that engage in the subject of comparative literary studies. Comparatists are employed in an academic setting. Comparative studies in literature might include, for instance, an examination of the literature that was created in India and Pakistan during the partition of parts of India and Pakistan. From a similar perspective, a study of partition books in India and the films that have been created on the issue would also be considered to come under the same genre.

The word "comparative literature" is really a misnomer since it is not used to identify or categorize any specific piece of literature; rather, it is used to refer to a technique of analysing literature. It is important to note that when we speak about comparative literature, we are really referring to comparative literature studies or comparative studies in literature.

Literary criticism is not new; the comparative study of literature is as ancient as Aristotle, for example, had a comparative approach to literary study. He turned to a comparison between poetry and painting to address the issue of connection among philosophy, history, and art. As the great impact of Greek literature on Latin revealed, the ancient Romans understood the value of comparative literary study. (Students will remember that the first Block 1, MEG-1: British Poetry course covers in great depth the interactions between poetry and art using images.)

Comparative literature studies originated in Germany and France among the work of mythologists and ancient literary historians. It became clear that literature frequently interacts and does not stay limited to the political borders of the nations of their birth. Though the relationships among the modern languages and literatures themselves acquired new critical attention in this century, the historical links between modern European literatures and classical literatures were too clear. Scholars from Europe who discovered striking parallels between the mythological systems and the language patterns also cleared the path for the research of commonality across many languages. This stage of comparative literary research was limited essentially to the study of effect of one literature on another, or of one writer on another, or of one text of a language on another text written in another language. French academics developed a complex system of tracking the impact of language "A" on language "B" and to investigate as well as the pathways of impacts. One may see such a situation as the initial phase of academic subject comparative literary studies.

Most likely, Matthew Arnold invented the English comparative literature concept first. Writing in a letter to his sister, Arnold said (May 1848): "How plain it is now, though an attention to the comparative literatures for the last fifty years might have instructed any one of it, that England is in a certain sense far behind the continent". Most likely, Arnold translated the phrase Literary Comparee used by French researcher

Villemain in 1829.

Moreover, it may be argued that Matthew Arnold was the first critic and creative writer who explicitly called for comparative literary studies. Arnold strongly said in his first lecture given at Oxford in 1857: The show, the data, given for understanding the Present age is certainly quite great.

Institutions, the sciences, the arts, the literature, in which human existence has shown itself up to the present; the spectacle is the collective life of mankind. And everywhere there is connection; everywhere there is illustration; no one event, no one book, is sufficiently understood except in reference to other events, to other literatures. Long as they are seen as separate literatures, the literature of ancient Greece, the Christian Middle Age, so long as they are treated as isolated growths of the human spirit, two independent developments of the human spirit, are not enough understood, and it is sufficient understanding which is needed of the current age. While Matthew Arnold underlined the significance of comparative literary studies, H.M. Posnett, a brilliant Irish barrister-turned-comparatist from Britain who subsequently authored *Comparative Literature* (1886) in any language, most likely the first work on the topic, and became a professor of Classics and English literatures at the University College, Auckland. Posnett is therefore regarded as the first researcher who authored a book solely addressing the ideas and techniques of a new discipline. Comparative literature, he described as "the general theory of literary evolution, the idea that literature passes through stages of inception, pinnacle and decline". Later academics who rejected Comparative Literature simply as a "general theory of literary evolution" and who aimed to define its mission more precisely regarded Posnett's concept of Comparative Literature as insufficient. Comparative literature has been claimed to be a study of literatures in touch at a certain historical moment and location, not a comprehensive history of literature or global literature.

First offered in the United States at Cornell University in 1871 by the Reverend Charles Chauncey Shackford and subsequently at the University of Michigan from 1887 to 1889, the first course dedicated only to comparative literature studies was Founded at Columbia University in 1899, the first American department of comparative literature was the one oldest Head of the department was George E. Woodberry. His main focus in his field of work is "sources, themes, forms environments and artistic parallels," thereby merging sociological viewpoint with conventional domains.

Comparative Literature Studies did not, however, become firmly established as discipline in the United States until the post-war years. Launched several publications, and according on a study included in Volume Twenty (1971) of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, the United States alone had over seventy-degree awarding programs. The American School adopted multidisciplinary as its main component, apart from the nationalistic inclination of the European governments. From the very start, there was also a propensity to perceive comparativism in utopian international terrain with presumptions about the humanizing capacity of outstanding works of art.

Comparative literature departments became as centres of theoretical activity in the seventies with the arrival of the period of theory. While theory for many connected with deconstruction and its methods, comparative literature studies were never fully taken over by deconstructive theory with its undecidability and comparisons that would lead to indifference. Instead, ideas with innovative insights from ethical angles about social activities had a great influence. Different concerns about the nature of literature's link to experience, to ideology, of the relationship between gender and power which were being questioned within feminism and other schools of thought became relevant. The study of literature gained further dimensions from Foucault's analysis of discourse connected with the regulatory mechanism of power and Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic imagination and of language as a very changing collection of discourses. Additionally influencing this was New Historicism's fresh setting for reading literary works. Following the release of Edward Said's *Orientalism* and writings by Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, colonial and postcolonial studies also became very significant. But what has been said above is true not just of the United States but also of research on comparative literature conducted elsewhere.

II. The American View

A researcher from the United States named S.S. Praver has provided a definition of comparative literature that is both advantageous and practical. He points out that comparative literature research involves "an examination of literary texts (including works of literary theory and criticism) in more than one language, through an investigation of contrast, analogy, provenance or influence; or a study of literary relations and communications between two or more groups that speak different languages". Indeed, American academics expanded the scope of comparative literature to include other forms of artistic expression as well. In this particular setting, the following definition, which includes a new definition of comparative literature, is also an illustration of the adaptability of the American school of comparative literature. Henry H. Remak, who is widely regarded as "one of the most distinguished scholars and also one of the greatest exponents of Comparative Literature in our time from the United States," is the author of this work. According to Remak, Comparative Literature is the study of literature that extends beyond the borders of a single nation. It is also the study of the

relationship between literature, on the one hand, and other fields of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (for example, politics, economics, and sociology), the sciences, religion, and other fields. In a nutshell, it is the process of contrasting one literary work with similar works from other fields of human expression. This all-encompassing definition not only broadens the scope of Comparative Literature Studies, but it also expands the myriad of purposes that it serves, particularly in the fields of other artistic disciplines.

III. The French View

French academics have emphasized the significance of the study of 'influence' or 'relationship' as an essential component of comparative literature studies. This is because it is crucial to comprehend and appreciate the progression of literary growth. French academic Paul Varat Tiegheem said in 1921 that general literature studies trends and fashions, transcends national borders, and focuses on the interrelationships between two or more literatures. Comparative literature studies, on the other hand, concentrate on the literary connections between two or more literatures. In his statement, he declared that "the object of Comparative Literature is essentially the study of various literatures in their relations with one another." An additional French academic named M.F. Guyard provided a definition of Comparative Literature, which he described as "the history of international literary relations." According to the facts, it is possible to assert that the French scholars of comparative literature studies placed a significant amount of importance on "factual contacts that took place between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, Walter Scott and Vigny, between the works, the inspirations, and even the lives of writers belonging to several literatures."

IV. The Indian View

An article written by Rabindranath Tagore in 1906 and titled "Visva-Sahitya" (which translates to "World Literature") was the first time that the concept of comparative literature in India was being discussed. Tagore elaborated on the concept that was presented in Goethe's World Literature during his visit to India. He makes the following statement: "Just as the world does not mean my land, your land, and his land, and to think thus of the world is to think in a parochial manner, so literature is not my work." This fragmented mode of seeing literature is something that we have developed as a habit. Now is the time for us to break away from the stifling influence of parochialism and examine the portrayal of humanity in literature from across the world. In addition to Tagore, a large number of other nationalists, politicians, and philosophers, such as Sri Aurobindo, discussed Indian literature from a broad perspective. However, it is possible that comparative literature was not the primary focus of their work. Several Indian academics, notably Buddhadev Bose (1908-), the first Professor of the subject in India, did not become significantly concerned with the nature of the topic and its methods until after the Department of Comparative Literature was established at Jadavpur University in 1956. This was the first time that the department had been established. In recent years, modern Indian literary critics have come to see the value of comparative literature studies as a new place for comprehending the significance and uniqueness of each Indian literary work. Previously, these studies had been conducted in isolation inside the departmental structure of our educational institutions. Because of this, Comparative Study of Indian Literature is the study of the literature of a single country, despite the fact that it is written in a number of different languages. The statement "Indian Literature is one, even though it is written in many languages" was made by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. In this sense, a comparative study of Indian literature is the study of the literature of one country that emerges as regional literatures. This is because Indian literature is a kind of literature. Through his enormous works and lectures that he presented on the issue, Sisir K. Das advocated passionately for the elimination of the barriers that separated the various literary departments in Indian universities and for the establishment of a new awareness of literature that is interdependent and connected. He published the following in his work titled "Muses in Isolation": "The teaching of literature must have a hardcore or national literature, but it must accommodate the literatures of other cultures."

4.1 Comparative Studies in Indian Literature and Indian Writing in English

Almost immediately after the establishment of the British empire, a new stream of English writing appeared in India. This new literature was written in English. At the beginning of the twentieth century, this new literary movement, which was characterized by Indian writers writing in English, reached its maturity and generated a considerable body of literary writings that were worthy of serious examination from experts in the field. This literature was influenced by the English language, and for a period of time, it was regarded to be a part of the literary traditions that originated in South India and England. As a result, it is reasonable to refer to this literature as a bi-product of the exchanges that took place between the literary traditions of two nations, namely India and England. On the one hand, it offers a new field of comparative literature that takes into account the Indian experience and Indian literary traditions, while on the other hand, it takes into account the English language heritage. The pursuit of comparative Indian literary studies has been met with enthusiastic participation by Indian instructors of English. This engagement has been marked by a high level of enthusiasm.

A comparatist has made the observation that this is a "taste of better things to come," and they have remarked on it. The following two patterns are possible to imagine arising as a result of this interaction: Not only do those who are inclined to support studies in Indian literature seem to have recognized the continuous usage of English in India, but they also appear to have embraced the major fact of creative writing in English by Indians. As a matter of fact, they argue vehemently that it is pointless to criticize the Indo-English writer for his decision to choose English, which he learned, as the medium of his creative expression rather than his home language. As Sri Aurobindo has rightly stated: "It is not true in all cases that one can't write first-class things in a learnt language" (Collected Works), (b) secondly, Indo-English writers themselves have realized that the Indo-English literature written by them is after all one of the Indian literatures even though (paradoxically as it may seem) English is not exactly one of the "Indian" languages. Also, it is considered that the sooner the Indo-English literature starts to connect with other Indian authors and works, the better it would be for the development of comparative studies in Indian literature. This is because the sooner it begins to interact, the more it would be beneficial.

V. Conclusions

It is not an incorrect statement to assert that Comparative Studies in Indian Literature are as natural to the language and literary condition in India as petals are to a rose flower. India is a society that is both multilingual and multicultural, and the fundamental structure, framework, text, and setting of Indian literature all have a comparison system built into them. The assertion is developed upon further, and it is brought to the reader's attention that "there is a significant difference between Comparative India Literature and Comparative Western Literature and Comparative Indian Literature." The first is comparative literature in a multilingual setting, while the second is comparative literature in a world that is varied and contains many different languages. While one is comparable in and of itself, the other is required to figure out how to compare things. The criteria of informal studies in comparative settings was noticed in the ancient literatures of India, just as it was observed in the case of Greek and Roman literatures.

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