



## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

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### Abstract

This article attempts to explain the importance of ‘Comparative Literature’, as an academic discipline. R. K. Dhawan tells that etymologically the term ‘Comparative Literature’ means “any literary work that compares”, such a comparison could be in terms of structure, style or the philosophic vision of different texts either of the same or different genres in given literatures.

Comparative literature studies interaction between literatures in various countries in various languages. The objective of Comparative literature is to widen one’s perspective by discovering dominant trends in a literature and culture and to understand the relations between two or more literatures in terms of these trends. Comparative literature is the branch of literary study which concerns itself with the basic structures which underline all literature of any kind; There is, therefore, in theory, no limit to its scope.

**Key words:** Comparative Literature, Literatures, Basic structures, Languages.

Tagore refers to comparative literature by the name “Vishwasahithya” and remarks that from this narrow provincialism, we must free ourselves; we must strive to see the work of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man’s universal creativity and that universal spirit in its manifestations through world literature.

It is universally accepted that human beings, no matter which part of the earth they inhabit, are one in the basic human ethos and sensibilities, hopes and aspirations, feelings of ecstasy and agony, joy and sorrow, good and evil. Of course, there are some distinctions in the manner of expressions and forms of manifestation of these human traits and sensibilities. These differences, of course stem from the national specificity mainly related to the realm of superstructure of different countries and nations.

The aim of a comparatist should be to find out the implications and the underlying identities of both similarities and differences. The comparatist has to keep an open mind and should be earnest and sincere in his enquiry and desire for truth. It is necessary that he should analyse the literary influences of each work of art. Influences undergo a considerable change in the process of recreation and in the finished product, they emerge something quite different and new.

Comparative literature is a study of literature that aims at developing literature as a single discipline having a viable international perspective; this is done without disturbing the separate identities of national literatures at one stage but uniting them into a consciousness of a unified literary experience in the final analysis.

The study of Comparative literature is not confined to one particular country. It deals with the relationships between literatures on the one hand and on the other the areas of knowledge and belief, such as arts, philosophy, history, social sciences, religion etc. Rene Wellek rightly points out that this discipline will study all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unit of all literary creation and experience.

Literary process, which gets realised through a totality of mutually determining intraliterary (National) and interliterary (International) links and similarities and in which the evolutionary march of the world literature finds its expressions, is in the specific meaning of the word, the subject of comparative study.



Unity of human feelings, universal humanity and emotional integration can be achieved through comparative literature. It creates an understanding and awareness between two linguistic people undoubtedly it helps in universal brotherhood. We may compare two trends, two poets, languages and underlying structures and cultural aspects. Languages is only the demarcating line. All human consciousness and all creative ability is same. Literature is the result of human creativity, emotion and expression of experience. This is the universal attitude through which we shake our hands with comparative literature.

In France, it is in different shape, comparing one nation literature to the other to trace out unity. Since centuries, together total Europe continent has its own unity like one family and got its universal significance. But after establishing their colonies in other countries like India, they quarrelled each other for survival for supremacy. Then, comparative literature grew as a distinct school here.

Introduction of Sanskrit in western literature created much zeal. By this, they began to know knowledge from India and China. A bridge has been formed between east and west. Goethe tells “National literature is now rather an unmeaning term, the epoch of world literature is at hand and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.

In America, the shape of comparative literature varies. They studied comparisons in between one literature and other branches of human knowledge like Arts, Science, History. Today it is being called science of literature, literature in translation, theory of literature, world classic and world of literature.

Ananda Kumaraswamy expressed the opinion that civilization had to be human rather than local or national otherwise it would cease to exist. Shakespeare distinguished himself by his profound application of the common humanity of an infinite variety of man.

There can be no doubt that human nature is the same all over the world. Its expression in different literatures is bound to have deep-seated similarities and affinities. Comparative literature can focus attention on them in a systematic way.

Max Muller said that “All higher knowledge is gained by comparison and rests on comparison”. 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.

T. S. Eliot makes the following remarks about the significance of a comparative approach in literature.

Comparison and analysis are the chief tools of the critic. Techniques of comparison form a natural part of the literary critic’s analytic and evaluative process, in discussing one work, critics frequently have in mind and almost as frequently appeal to works in the same or another language.

For a comparatist all literatures are the same in spite of their superficial differences. He deals with literature as a total human sensibility. It is through the methods of comparative literature that we come to a better understanding of literary processes and formulate better criteria for evaluation.

There is a great scope for the study of comparative literature in India. All Indian literature is one though written in many languages. The cultural basis in India is the same though there are marked differences owing to the genius of the regional language. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata like literary production are the same to the total Indians. The Sanskrit language showed much influence over all Indian languages.

All the Indian languages and literatures were greatly influenced by the spread of English Education. This led to the introduction of new literary genres like the novel, the short story, the essay and the biography in the Indian languages. The history and development of all these genres in all Indian languages follow a general pattern.



It is a well known fact that Indian literature have been enriched due to the influence of the west. It is due to our contact with the west that a certain kind of Romanticism has blossomed in Indian literature. Number of Indian writers in different languages were inspired by the English poets like Shakespeare, Shelley, Keats, Byron, Tennyson and Browning

One must have an open mind to make a comparative study between one literature and other literature. In this context C. D. Narsimhaiah suggests that we should keep our doors and windows open for fresh winds to blow into our houses.

The discovery of Indian by the western, says – S.K. Das “ is one of the most significant events in the history of India and indeed in the history of human civilisation.

The range of comparative literature is very wide because it is concerned with the globe. Just as a national literature is the reflection of the national history, comparative literature is reflection of the world literature.

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