

**KUNTHAVAI NAACCHIYAAR GOVERNMENT ARTS COLLEGE FOR WOMEN(AUT),
THANJAVUR-613007.
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

II MA ENGLISH, III SEMESTER 2020-2021

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

CODE :18KP3E10

UNIT-I

Definition and Scope of Comparative Literature

History of the Discipline and Development

INTRODUCTION:

Comparative Literature is an interdisciplinary field. It inspires the desire of the scholars to study literature beyond National boundaries. They have to study literature across National Borders, across different periods, languages, genres. The Scholars of Comparative Literature try to bring out the relationship between literature and other arts like music, painting, dance and film. They have to compare the disciplines like literature and psychology, science, history, sociology, architecture, politics, etc... Comparative Literature has become a universally accepted discipline today. There was a time when this field was looked down upon as a freak. According to Nirmala Jain,

“Comparative Literature as a discipline implies transcending the frontiers of single languages and National Literatures. For Comparitist, any literature is basically a literature, which has to be studied with reference to other literatures, generally on a bi-or multilingual or national basis” (Nirmala Jain 79)

Comparative Literature reciprocates the desire to integrate literary experience with other cultural phenomena such as historical change, philosophical concepts and social movements.

DEFINITION OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE:

The term 'Comparative Literature' is a troublesome term to be defined. This term has been broadly defined as a study of 'literature without borders'. It's a unique discipline implies transcending the frontiers of single languages and national literature. H.H.Remak's an American Comparatist defined "Comparative Literature is a study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationships between literature on the one hand and other area of knowledge and belief such as the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture, music etc..) philosophy, history and social sciences(Eg.Politics, economics, sociology), religion etc...on the other. In brief it is the comparison of one literature with another and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human experience".The American concept of Comparative Literature includes the survey on the relationship between the literature and other fields. The American concept indicates that the method must be specified.

Rene Wellek tries to give some definition to the umbrella term 'Comparative Literature' by studying the root of the word, historical context and the varied meanings it has been assigned overtime. Comparative Literature looks at literature from a cosmopolitan and international perspective with literary creation and experience. This discipline does not have any pattern or system. The method involves a mixture of various aspects like description, characterization, interpretation, narration, explanation, evaluation along with comparison. Comparison includes not only historical context but also even unrelated ones.

SCOPE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE:

The scope of Comparative Literature has always been an effective way of deepening and broadening one's knowledge and horizons about the similarities and dissimilarities. This is the main objective of Comparative Literature. The study of Comparative Literature enhances the critical thinking of the scholars and they have to be vulnerable to what Comparative Literature is all about and the scope it encompasses. This attitude will help them to critically evaluate the literary texts.

In Comparative Literature, there are two different dimensions to be classified. They are linguistics and cultural. It analyses the similarities, dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. Comparative Literature further studies themes, modes, conventions and the use of folktales, myths in two different literatures or even more.

CONCEPTS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE:

Wellek and Warren have used the term Comparative Literature in three different sense:

*The first sense, to them it may mean the study of oral literature, especially of folktales themes and their migration of how and when they have entered 'higher', 'artistic', 'literature'. Oral literature is an integral part of culture should be read along with written literature. The interaction between oral literature and written literature of a particular culture or country can be studied profitably by comparison.

*The second sense in Wellek and Warren have taken Comparative Literature is "the study of relationships between two or more literatures". The general notion is that a literature is usually known by the language in which it is written. For example, how the people distinguish Oriya literature from Bengali Literature and Bengali literature from Hindi Literature and so on. But in the postcolonial period-several literatures are written in

the same language for example, English literature, Canadian literature, American literature, Indian English Literature, etc...all are written in English language.

*The third sense in which Wellek and Warren uses the term Comparative Literature is by identifying it with World Literature.

HISTORY OF THE COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND IT'S DEVELOPMENT:

The term 'Comparative Literature' was first used by Mathew Arnold, translating Ampere's use of 'historic comparative' The French Scholars prefer the term used earlier by Villemain, who used the term 'Littérature Comparée' It was coined on the analogy of Cuvier's Anatomie Comparée. The German Scholars use the term "Vergleichende Literaturgeschichte". The term actually refers to the formal comparison to literature or movements, figures and works. Since its emergence in 20th century France, Comparative Literature has gone worldwide. After World War II, Comparative Literature developed quickly as a discipline particularly in US and Germany, as well as across Europe. While Comparative Literature may have initially focused on the relationship between different national literatures, historical development such as European expansion, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the increasing worldwide mobility added a new significance.

According to Susan Basnett, "the term Comparative Literature appeared in an age of transition. In Europe, as nations struggled for independence from the Ottomenn Empire from the Austro-Hungarian Empire from France, from Russia and new nation states came into being, National identity (whatever that was) was inextricably bound up with national culture (however that was defined)" (Susan Basnett 20)

Paul Van Tiegem defines the objective of Comparative Literature as essentially the study of diverse literature in their relations with one another. While Guyard on the other hand sees it to be "The History of International Literary Relations" . J.M. Carre

calls it 'A Branch of literary history' and a study of spiritual international relations. He also brings the fact that the writers of diverse literature influence others and their works. Anna Saitta Revignas who considers it as "A modern science which centers on research into the problems connected with the influences exercised reciprocally by various literature". Sandra Bermann has rightly observed thus: "Comparative Literature juxtaposes literary texts from different languages and cultures. It connects, say, a poem with dance, a film with the novel, photography with the essay".

Steven Totosy Zepetnek has illustrated as "First Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and /or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the other, say, a marginal literature". (Comparative Literature: Theory, method, Application 1998)

The development of National awareness and consciousness has gone beyond the legacy of Colonialism has led to the development of Comparative Literature in all over the world, even as the subject enters a period of decay and crisis in the Western Countries. But in countries like Brazil, China, India and many African nations have used Comparative Literature in a constructive manner and try to explore the indigenous traditions and imported traditions. The opening statements of 'The Empire Writes back' explain the following phrases. "the term post-colonial is most appropriate as the term for the new cross-cultural criticism which merged in recent years and for the discourse which this is constituted". What is this, but Comparative Literature under another name? a question has raised by Susan Bassnett (Bassnett 10).

It is the fact that numerous comparative critical approaches from Plato to Aristotle, Longinus, Virgil, Dante, Seneca, Goethe, Arnold, Voltaire, Flaubert, Lamartine, Balzac, Diderot, Taine, Sainte-Beuve and many others who have opened a

window towards the Comparative Literature or the Comparative Study of different literatures.

UNIT-II

Different Schools of Comparative Literature- French School, American School, Russian School

SCHOOLS OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE:

H.H.Remak defines Comparative Literature as “Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the boundaries of a particular country and it is the study of relations among the literatures and other scientific areas of knowledge and belief”. The definition has rightly brought out the original concept of a Comparative Literature at French school, but there is a very clear differences between them in the field of scientific study and other issues. Comparative Literature is nothing but the amalgamation of literatures in their different languages. It links the present with past.

Comparative Literature may also mean the study of relationship between two or more literatures. This is the use established by French Comparatist especially Fernand Baldensperger. This school has devoted much attention to such questions as the reputation and penetration, the influence and fame. A methodology has been evolved dealing with image, the concept of a particular author at a particular time and other factors.

Comparative Literature is now accepted as an independent field by view of the combination of scholarly ideas and opinion. Due to geographical distance between different countries as well as the differences of opinion among Comparative Literature study scholars of various countries have given birth to some schools of comparative studies of literature. The name of these schools have been given after the names of these

countries. They are the French school, the Russian school, the Canadian School, the American School etc., In the Contemporary period there are two more schools have been emerged., they are Chinese schools and Indian schools. The conflicts of opinions have cropped up among the scholars of all these schools.

THE FRENCH SCHOOL

French-German school in the field of Comparative Literary studies, the scholars have given much importance to historical perspective. Even it is popularly called the French-German school, it may be referred the ideology of the whole of Europe. This European perspective is rooted in the desire for colonial expansion due to industrial revolution. The main objective of this school is searching for interstate or intercultural relationships in literature. Some scholars of this school have come out with suggestion that Comparative Literature is an integral part of history. The structure of the French school is based on the analysis of the raw materials supplied by history. As Paul Van Tieghem, a great scholar of this school, Comparative Literature is the mutual study of different literature- “The object of Comparative Literature is essentially the study of diverse literature in their relations with one another” (Discriminations by Rene Wellek P-15).

The revelation of this historical relationship is still one of the important features of the French school. This comes out from the writings of the scholars of this school, like Brunel, Van Tieghem, Pichois, James Rene Etiemble and others are interested in imitation in the study of Comparative Literature. At the outset they have much interest in inter literary historical source.

“The French School, according to them, established the foundation of solid research, the necessity, before any interpretation, of an impeccable and minute chronology ‘la Principale difficulte netant pas ditablir des dates, mois de les choisir’ (the principle

problem being not to establish dates, but to choose them) – the obligation of a supernational erudition backed by good linguistic knowledge, the reassembling of a multitude of off-neglected but connected facts pertaining to civilization”

The field of study of Comparative Literature according to French school:

Literary schools and genres

Ideological Echoes

Image echoes

Verbal echoes

Human models and heroes

According to this school, Comparative Literature is such a historical means by which the process of evolution of literature may be analyzed. In due course of time, there are some new thoughts have been incorporated into the French-German school. The French theoretician Rene Eliemble has illustrated that in Comparative Literature is the basis of humanity. According to him, the study of Comparative Literature enhances the mutual love and fellow feeling and acceptability among different nations which helps in the process of the forward movement of all mankind. As he spoke of historicism, so he spoke of ‘aesthetics’ – “History and historicism are not always progressive, nor aesthetics always reactionary”

THE AMERICAN SCHOOL

The American school of Comparative Literature has flourished its glorious development in 1958, after the conclusion of the second conference of the International Comparative Literature Association. This conference was held in North Carolina University at Chapel hill. In the conference all the currents and ideas of comparative Literature were analyzed and elaborate plan was drafted out for the progression of Comparative Literature. The famous American Scholar Rene Wellek delivered his

famous speech entitled “The Crisis of Comparative Literature”. This epoch-making speech became the source of significant changes that was brought out in the theorization of Comparative Literature. That is the significant beginning of American school and end of French- German school. As Yue Daiyum in “Prospect of Chinese Comparative Literature” wrote.

“Wellek believed that a work of art was a symbolic structure but one possessing significance and value requiring substantiation with meaning and value. As soon as the structure was formed, it stood apart from the mental process of the writer engaged in writing and become a substance of independent existence. Never the less, he had made an important contribution to the development of World Comparative Literature because he stressed that intrinsic literary nature was a central question of aesthetics and indicated literary research must take literature as a discipline to be studied, which differed from other human activities and their products. On the basis he set forth the “Crisis of Comparative Literature”.

Rene Wellek has delivered a speech in the second conference insisted aesthetics and universalism have been incorporated to historical studies in comparative study of literature. American school is the real founder of aesthetic evaluation of Comparative Literature. This school has given the gifts like broadness of view, aesthetic evaluation and universal sensibility to Comparative Literature. The famous American Comparatists like Rene Wellek, Austia Warren, Harry Lavin, H.H. Henry Remak, Paul Warner Fredrich, Owen Alridge have dealt on the search of similarity, imitation influence, tradition etc..They emphasize the greatest amount of importance on aesthetics.

Its main objective was to depoliticize Comparative Literature by going beyond the political borders of literary texts. It has mainly two fields of study. They are parallelism and intertextuality. The parallelism gives no importance to influence. Intertextuality

means the reference of a given text to another text. New text are always read under the light of old texts.

THE RUSSIAN SCHOOL

Russian schools developed in 1960s is a combination of influence study and parallel study. It aims to correct the bias of French and American school. According to Russian school the French and American schools started with wide area of knowledge, but their comparative aspect of literature offers to partially connect with social and historic conditions. They give importance to West-criticism attitude. After overcoming the influence from ultra- left trend of thought and Russia Centrism. This school insisted that comparison of literature should closely related with social and historic backgrounds. The comparative study of literatures in socialist countries, opening a new field in Comparative Literature study.

The Russian school in the realm of critical analysis of Comparative Literature is known to be comparatively conservative. When Rene Wellek of the American School spoke about aesthetics and wanted a unification of national characteristics with ‘universal cosmopolitanism’ in the research of Comparative Literature, the Russian scholars vehemently protested against this. E,G. Napokoeva called it “narrow formalism” Napokoeva says. The tusk set forth for Comparative Literature by Wellek was a process of studying the living history of literature from the multifaceted perspective of the entire nation. Instead it “liberated” the works analyzed from the social content and national characteristics that constituted the works. At the same time the national boundaries between different literature were obliterated so that the distinctive contribution made by every nation to the world or/and culture was blended into given man-made “global literature”.

According to Napokoeva the best method of judging Comparative Literature is the Marxian method. Because this is the method to judge impartially the contribution of the common people to literature. The Russian scholars are not interested to move beyond the Marxist point of view. They are not satisfied with the capital analysis, but to plead for a democratic method for every common man, that is the main contribution of the Russian school to Comparative Literature.

References:

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3. Yue Daiyan –Prospects of Chinese Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice (P-41, 56, 57)
4. Subha Dasgupta –“The French School of Comparative Literature”-Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice (P 19-20)
5. Wellek and Warren- Theory of Literature-(P-49)
6. Amiya Dev and Sisir Kumar Das., ed., Comparative Literature (P – 79)
7. Newton P. Sallknecht and Harst Frenz, ed., Comparative Literature: Method and Perspective (P – 1)
8. Harry Levis, Grounds for Comparison (P – 72)

SHORT QUESTIONS:

1. Define – Comparative Literature
2. Who is the Father of Comparative Literature?
3. Who has coined the term Comparative Literature?
4. Mention any four American School of Comparatists
5. What is the objective of French school?
6. How does Russian School give importance to Marxian method?
7. Who are the pioneers of French school?
8. What is the definition of Rene Wellek on Comparative Literature?
9. Mention any two fields of study of French school.
10. When was Russian school emerged in the field of Comparative Literature?
