

COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LITERATURE ACROSS LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL BARRIERS

DR. M. SURESH KUMAR

Abstract: A comparative study of literature aims to evince similarities and diversities of two texts. It is one of the oldest methods adopted by scholars to satiate their intellectual curiosity. The objective of the paper is to unveil the significance of Comparative Study of Literature today as it attempts to take cognizance of valuable literary works produced across the world. Literature mirrors culture and tradition of a contemporary society. Every literary text acts as a tool that reflects varied cultures and society. World is the linguistic galaxy, a treasure trove of various literatures which need to be unearthed for the perusal of the literary scholars. Hence the comparative study of literature is an attempt to illuminate cultural plurality with reference to cross cultural understanding which is very essential today. The time has ripened where the western scholars have become aware of the fact that studying western history alone would not provide the knowledge of the world. Literary scholars of the west have become self-conscious of their own perspectives. This intellectual process involves an awareness of possible validity of other perspectives and of the need to incorporate the ideologies of non-western societies that had been so far excluded and laid outside the field of their "single vision". Critics widely discuss the need and importance of comparative literature to promote cross cultural relations. Although critics of the twentieth and twenty first century do not find much substance in comparative study of literature, research scholars are always keen to explore the possibility of treading into the foreign texts to gain knowledge of 'other' cultures.

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Introduction: Literature mirrors culture and tradition of a contemporary society. Every literary text acts as a tool that reflects culture and tradition of different society. World is the linguistic galaxy, a treasure trove of various literatures which need to be unearthed to satiate the intellectual curiosity of the scholars. Hence the comparative study of literature is an attempt to illuminate cultural plurality that provides key to cross cultural understanding which is very essential today. The time has ripened where the western scholars have become aware of the fact that perusing western history alone would not provide the knowledge of the world. Literary scholars of the west have become self-conscious of their own perspectives. Hudson Macaulay Posnett, an Irish barrister who later became the Professor of Classics and English Literature at University College, Auckland wrote a book on *Comparative Literature* in 1886¹. This book is an erudite presentation accentuating the need and importance of bringing non-European literatures into the orbit of the *World Literature*. The process involves an awareness of possible validity of other perspectives and of the need to incorporate the ideologies of non-western society that had been so far excluded and laid outside the field of their "single vision".

Rene Wellek penned his views on Comparative study in his article *The Name and Nature of Comparative Literature*². He highlights how Lane Cooper disapproved of the term Comparative Literature and criticized that it was a bogus term that made neither syntax nor sense. The term is as derogatory as

'comparative potatoes' or 'comparative husks' and therefore he prefers to call it as Comparative Study of Literature which sounds more establish term.

Though the formal comparative study of literature can be traced back to the nineteenth century, the practice of this method could be identified from various countries and in various languages had been ever since the time when Romans measured their own poetry and oratory against that of the Greeks; and reference to works in several languages came naturally to the leaders of taste who proposed a catholic view of Western Literature in the Renaissance.

The Comparative study plays a major role in converging literatures of different countries. No scholar can fully appreciate the individuality of any poet, his place, tradition and modification of that tradition without comparing his work implicitly or explicitly with that of great writers who had established their skills and knowledge effectively through their works. However the scholars of twentieth and twenty first century do not find any substance in Comparative Literature, for the term is obfuscatory on the ground that it is firmly anchored in literary history.

Comparative Literature further suffered between the two world wars with the advent of New Criticism which emphasised autonomy of the text and autotelic nature of its 'close' study in isolation. New Criticism discourages any recognition to the existence of other texts pertaining to themes or motifs. This approach of anonymity of the text with

no relationship with other texts ruled out the possibility of the Comparative study as this needs at least two texts to analyse. However, T.S.Eliot is an exception who in his *Tradition and Individual Talent*, asserts that the function of tradition is to compare and contrast to find out the ways in which a tradition of a society operates.

In 1940s Northrop Fye discovered continuity of literature with 'myth' imbedded as epicentre of the structure. Fry's Myth Criticism stood apart from New Criticism which provided an impetus to promote comparative study of literature. He identified mythical pattern and structural elements in literature.

"It is true that I call the elements of literary structure myth, because they are myths; it is true that I call the elements imagery archetypes, because I want a word which suggests something that changes its context but not its essence". (Fyre, 553)³

The different critical theories emerged during this period like structuralism, Post structuralism, deconstruction are entrenched on critical and theoretical formulations of comparative literature which opened new avenues and pursuits to the study. Amidst different theoretical approach, a research scholar should take a broader look and investigate thoroughly to unravel the form and content of the selected texts. This approach widens the horizon of the scholars to perceive a work from different angle pertaining to culture and language. This study also provides a platform to the scholars to know about the valuable literary works produced in other languages.

A comparative study of literature poses a great challenge while comparing the two texts from different languages and culture. Twentieth century literature reverberates with the signifiers, 'Incommensurability, 'otherness', and 'plurality'. Literary scholars have been concerned with understanding what underlies and pervades the multiplicity, diversity and sheer contingency that encountered in the everyday lives of the people. The scholars argue if there is fundamental essential unity that encompasses multiplicity. These questions propel the writers to cross linguistic and cultural barriers. Nevertheless the writers tend to examine if multiplicity could lead to universality; hence, an attempt is being made to reconcile the identity of difference. This unity of identity with difference is possible only when the approach of the study reconciles to present the study at the universal level. The scholars have to face the challenge of incommensurable languages and cultures during the study.

But comparison and evaluation requires the cultivation of hermeneutical sensitivity and imaginations. The feelings and emotions of human beings and their response to certain events whether it

is war or wedding invokes similar experience. Hence great books produced in different countries claim universal appeal. Indian scholars are conversant with great poet William Wordsworth and European scholars are conversant with Rabindranath Tagore, one of the most popular writers of India. The comparative study promotes exchange of knowledge on diverse culture and language. The scholars of comparative study can explore the following arenas to overcome cultural and linguistic barrier:

1. The study of influence, analogies and inter-textuality with reference to cross cultural exchange and dialogic presentation of the select texts.
2. Recurring motif, themes and pre-figurations presented in the texts.
3. Adopting Translation Studies in case of bilingual study of literature.
4. Study of plot and characterization in relation to cultural and linguistic background and text-orientated criticism.
5. Investigating if the ideologies of feminism are incorporated in the texts.
6. Investigating the Mythical elements in the study.

Thematic study is the epic centre of a comparative study. This study attempts to register cultural manifestations of a society recorded in the texts of the study. This study explores the style of language adopted in the text pertaining to culture. For further study the scholars can focus on the below given points:

1. Contextualisation of culture bound connotations to drive meaningful message for the comparative study.
2. Perusing the literary history of the select text and its relevance to the genres and movements.
3. Critical analysis of the key terms not in isolation but in association with the pragmatic milieu of the texts.
4. Awareness of national traditions other than the nativity of the writer, perceiving the texts produced from other countries and other languages with openmind devoid of bias or prejudice.
5. In depth study of the social, political and cultural environment in which the texts are written and published to enhance cross cultural understanding.

The Study of Influence is one of the important ingredients of Comparative Study of Literature. The study comprises of the following heads:

1. Literary influence ingrained in the texts of analysis.
2. Mythological influence presented in the text.
3. Historical influence and political influence.

4. Inter-disciplinary influence like evincing the impact of paintings, music, nature and other arts in the concerned texts.

Different methodologies have been advocated by the research scholars for better Comparative study. Although critics doubt the standard of Comparative literature today, they have to accept the fact that Comparative Study of Literature plays a predominant role in strengthening good relations and unearthing the precious literary works from various parts of the world which have been marginalized by imperial culture. Comparative Study of Literature assumes more importance than ever before. The study of an individual writer might reveal his/her personal vision and approach towards life in general but there is a growing tendency among the readers to neglect that because the readers today are themselves equally enlightened. What matters in such situation is the comparative study of culture and ethos. Post modernism calls for collective consciousness, not in Jungian sense but in the Marxist sense of ideology evident in superstructure. Comparative study of Literature takes the scholars across the boundaries of nation breaking down the parochial notions of nation

and narration imprinting literary studies on the global canvas.

There have been various schools across the world endorsing Comparative Study of Literature. These schools, however, confine the study by construing the nationality of the writers rather than adopting optimistic and open outlook towards literary studies. French school, for example emphasizes upon the study of 'influence', whereas American considers the thematic resemblances more important. The German school considers the evocation of 'aesthetic impression' produced by the texts under the study as pivotal. These schools have asserted time and again the significance and superiority of Comparative Study of Literature supplementing the isolated studies of individual writers. The research scholars should possess keen perception to interpret the nuances of language and culture of the society portrayed in the texts of analysis. This approach would enhance cross cultural understanding. Broad outlook by accommodating the books produced by other countries into literary studies will remove cultural barriers and promote better understanding.

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Dr. M. Suresh kumar
Professor of English, Acharya Nagarjuna University, Guntur-522510.