CHAPTER-1
THEORY OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

The term 'Comparative Literature' is difficult to define for it evolves not one but two or even more than two literatures in comparison at the same time. It becomes still more difficult task when the comparatist has to take into consideration the multi-dimensional aspects of comparative literature such as-linguistic, cultural, religious, economic, social and historical factors of different societies.

In order to understand the term "comparative literature" we must analyse its nomenclature. Etymologically, the term comparative literature denotes any literary work or works when compared with any other literary work or works. Hence, comparative literature is the study of inter-relationship between any two or more than two significant literary works or literatures. It is essential that while making comparative study we must take the sources, themes, myths, forms, artistic strategies, social and religious movements and trends into consideration. The comparatist with his critical approach and investigations will find out, the similarities and dissimilarities among various works that he has undertaken for the purpose of comparison and justification lies in the fact that his approach must be unbiased and unprejudiced to reach the ultimate truth. It is only his earnest and sincere approach which will bring forth the naked truth or natural results and this really is the purpose of comparative study.

Taken broadly, comparative literature is a comprehensive term. Its scope encompasses the totality of human experiences into its embrace, and thus all internal human relationships among the various parts of the world are realized, through the critical approach to literatures under comparative study. It helps to vanish narrow national and international boundaries, and in place of that universality of human relationships emerges out. Thus the term comparative literature includes comparative study of regional literatures, national literatures, and international literatures. However, there are many over-lapping terms in this concern such as - Universal literature, General literature, International literature and World literature. Repeatedly, we can mention here that comparative literature includes experiences of human life and behaviour as a whole. In the conception of world literature the works of Homer, Dante,
Shakesperea, Milton, Goetha, Emerson, Thoreau, Valmik, Vyas should be taken as one for comparison.

Virgil’s Aeneid, Homer’s Iliad, Milton’s Paradise Lost, Indian Epics-the Ramayana and the Mahabharta can be studied in comparison as world literature.

If taken psychologically, human nature is undoubtedly, the same all over the world. That is why, human expressions in all literary works or literatures are bound to have deep-rooted similarities and affinities. Hence there lies affinities between the masterpieces of different literary works of different nations. Human nature, no doubt, is very complicated, and this complexity in different kinds of literary works makes comparative study a complex phenomenon.

As mentioned above, the comparative study is not different from a critical approach of a particular literature except the fact that here we deal with two or more than two literatures side by side. In this way, the subject matter becomes vaster and perspective wider. Boundaries of comparative literature have to be extended to encompass the entirety of human life and experiences in one’s embrace.

The definition of comparative literature given by Bijay Kumar Dass is very simple vivid and understandable:

The simple way to define comparative literature is to say that it is a comparison between the two literatures. Comparative literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures. It further studies themes, modes, conventions and use of folk tales, myths in two different literatures or even more.¹

Tagore refers to comparative literature by the name of 'Vishvasahita'. Broadening the scope of comparative literature he remarks:

"From narrow provincialism we must free ourselves, we must strive to see the works of each author as a whole, that whole as a part of man's universal creativity, and that universal spirit in its manifestation through world literature” (Quoted in Buddhadeva Bose, "Comparative Literature in India, "Contribution to Comparative Literature ; Germany and India, Calcutta, 1973).²
If taken historically, comparative literature has been a result of a reaction against the narrow nationalism of the 19th century scholarship in England. Though it was an occasional tradition, the comparative study of literary works was in vogue, right from the beginning of the Christian era. Romans were the pioneers in the field of comparative study. The Romans worked out the tradition of comparing the works of great orators and poets of Greek and Roman and found out many similarities among their studies of literary works. No doubt, Quintillion was the pioneer in this concern, but Longinus endeavoured to set the comparative study in systematized discipline. If he had preceded Quintillion he would have been the pioneer in this field. He brought forth the names of Homer and Plato etc. In Indian comparative approach the Sanskrit critics emerged out during the 6th century A.D. It is clear from the commentaries on Kalidasa's *Meghduta* and *Abhijnanasakutala*. After that the critics like Kuntaka and Abhinavagupta with their qualitative approach paved the way for modern comparatators.

R.S. Pathak, giving the historical development of the new discipline, comparative literature says:

Mathew Aronold made meaningful efforts in English world and emphasized strongly the significance of the comparative approach to literary works. He wrote in a letter in 1848, "Every critic should try and possess one great literature at least besides his own and more the unlike his own, the better."

Thus, he pioneered the comparative criticism in England and gave inspiration to other critics to work on this new discipline. It is hereby suggested that the comparatist should undertake the master pieces of creative writers, whose works have cosmopolitan status in literary fields. That is why, Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot called for a criticism of poetry on parameters of universal world-poetry, or the works of maximum excellence. This type of approach will direct comparative study of literature towards international level.

In his article, “Comparative Literature and Aesthetics: the search for a significant order" R.S. Pathak has indicated well-known aspects of traditional comparative studies i.e. Folklore, Influence, Genres and Themes:
Folklore

Folklore offered the starting point and in some cases the frame work, for successful studies in thematology.

Influence

Mazzini once said that a developed, cultivated literature, nurtured by itself, without influence from a foreign literature, is something unthinkable, centuries before him the Indian Poetician Rajasekhara had maintained that it is not that poets are not thieves. Writers have borrowed and even plagiarized occasionally in all ages, and some points of affinity between masterpieces of different literary traditions can be established on comparison.\(^4\)

In the support of above mentioned facts we can give details from Indian National and Regional Literatures.

Sanskrit being the language of ancient Hindu scriptures had its influence on Indian literatures especially on Northern Indian languages leaving aside Urdu, which is a language of the recent origin. Undoubtedly, it had not influenced much on Southern Indian literatures Still being the language of Hindu religion and culture, it did play a significant role in the process of development of Southern languages.

The Perso-Arabic influence had its effect due to political infrastructure. With the advent of Muslim rule in India, Persian though a foreign language highly affected the Indian literature as well as Indian culture, art, architecture, music, dance etc. A hybrid cultural came into existence. The Kathak dance, the form of Ramlila was enjoyed at the Mughul Court. Muslim monuments acquired Hindu temple motifs. Urdu, a dialect originated from the barracks, became a highly sophisticated and sweet language of literary expressions having no religious text at its support.

It is a fact that Arians and Muslims settled in India and made India their home. They influenced Indian culture and also adopted the Indian ways of life. The English ruled Indian from abroad and did not follow the main stream of Indian culture. Influence of the west could be seen in all aspects of Indian life, Indian culture, philosophy, politics, educational policies even medical sciences. English schools were opened and they taught English to the Indian people for communication purposes and
they also propagated their religion on Indian soil. On the other side when Raja Ram Mohan Roy visited Europe in 1830, it was just the first attempt of an Indian scholar to explore Europe and the process of give and take continued.

Initially, Americans came to India for trade and commerce, with the passage to time they began to take interest in cultural exchange, and further this closeness resulted into a keen American interest in the literary and philosophical heritage of India. When western world was indulged in material prosperity, the American scholars looked upon the east as their only hope for their spiritual rejuvenation. The Transcendentalists like Emerson, Alcott and Thoreau found a close kinship with ancient Hindu philosophy. Indian classics were translated into English by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sir William Jones and the Charles Wilkins and Americans responded to these translations enthusiastically. Even Mahatma Ghandi was highly impressed by the philosophical views of Thoreau and found many similarities between their thoughts.

**Genre**

Genre has been an important element of comparative literature curriculum. Ferdinand Bruntiere was the first showing deep interest is the evolution of genre. According to him every literary type has a birth, hayday and its wane.

**Theme**

The term themes literally interpreted would include various thematological categories such as motif, recurrent images etc. The study of themes may also take into account 'associations' of all types governed and directed by a variety of psychological and cultural factors which establish rules and patterns for them.\(^5\)

Moreover, Hudson is of the view that the comparative method will be of great service when it will deal literature historically. After his return to Russia in 1870, Alexander Veselovsky brought out a series of studies on the migration of themes, ranging all over the western and eastern world. Similarly, Richard Price, in his preface to the new edition of Warton's History of English Poetry (1824) regarded literature as a huge treasure house of themes which spread, multiply and migrate. French scholars also collected evidences about literary relations and migrations of themes and motives all over the world.
The two other important aspects of comparative literature are literary criticism and translation.

**Criticism**

Criticism is an important factor in the field of comparative study. Criticism of literary work does not mean to find out its weaknesses or shortcomings only. Critics should highly eulogize the good qualities of the work ‘if discovered’. To Renan-The comparative method is a “grand instrument of criticism” (*L’ Avenir de la science*) (Paris, 1890 p.269).

**Translation**

One thing more is worth mentioning hear that in comparative studies translation has a significant place. Translations are valuable in bringing about similarities and dissimilarities between significant works of literature and are very helpful in the field of research. Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam's Rubaiyat is an important point to be considered. Translation should be as close to the original work as possible. Only and only then, it is possible to understand and evaluate the original literary work. Translation can be used as a tool for comparative study. English translation of European classics will help Indian students to make their comparisons with Indian literatures. Similarly, Indian classics in English translation will be helpful for European students in comparative study with their own literatures. Thus translation helps the students of comparative literature to develop an international approach in different spheres such as literary, economic, social, philosophical, religious, cultural, historical and artistic values.

Translation is of paramount importance in comparative studies of world literatures as well as regional literatures. Without successful translation the comparative approach will miscarry. Moreover, the comparatist who compares two literary works written in two different languages must be bi-lingual as well as a successful translator. If a literary work is written in Persian and the other is in Punjabi, the task of comparison will be easy if he knows both the languages, Again if he knows even a third language (suppose English) the work of comparison will be easier.

It is true that translation of a literary work of literature cannot render the original taste yet it can convey the very message the author wanted to express and thus
it imparts a sense of discovery and hold together the body of world literature. On rare occasions a translation may be better than the original and at times it may have remarkable qualities to survive for a longer time.

According to Henry Gifford:

✓ A work translated can never be more than an oil painting reproduced in black and white.
✓ A translation, however impressive, cannot truly coexist with the original.
✓ The original works and their translations are not obviously one and the same.
✓ Translation is an instrument however fallible, without which vast areas of world literature would be lost to us.\textsuperscript{7}

In the present era the interest of comparative studies especially in multilingual countries is ameliorating. In Canada there are two main comparative literatures - English and French. The famous Canadian comparatists whose names are worth mentioning here are - Northrop Frye, Victor Graham, D.G. Jones, Ronald Sutherland etc. They have contributed much in the field of comparative literature. The name of Canadian Comparative Literature Association who founded the journal - The Canadian Review of Comparative Literature published by the Deptt of Comparative Literature, the University of Alberta, can be taken with pride. We can mention here the name of leading Australian comparatists like David Myers and many others of Queensland University. Their job in the sphere of comparative literature is praiseworthy. In India there are many leading comparatists namely, R.K. Dhawan R.S. Pathak, Viney Kirpal, O.M.Anujan, K.V.S. Murti, A. Ramakrishana Rao, O.P. Bhatnager, Bijay Kumar Das, Avadhesh Kumar Singh etc. have made significant contribution in the field of comparative literature. Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, has done an efficient job in this field by organizing a seminar on Comparative Literature, Theory and Practice. in June 1987.

Broadening the horizon of comparative literature Bijay Kumar Das comments:

Comparative literature transcends the narrowness, provinciality and parochialism of national and general literatures. The complacency of regional writers are shaken when the comparatists study their writings along with the
writings of other writers in different other languages.  

1. According to Max Muller "all higher knowledge is gained by comparison and rests on comparison"

2. According to Bosanquet “comparative literature can be of immense value … in freeing the mind from the shackles of provincialism and literary myopia.”

Hence, comparative studies will brighten the perspective of literary criticism and research. But still, the scope and methodology of comparative literature have been a subject of dispute for many critics:

It has been felt difficult to define precisely the content of comparative literature and to determine its scope. That is why, Wellek and Warren found the term 'troublesome' (Wellek & Warren, P - 46) Lane cooper goes to the extent of saying that comparative literature is a 'bogus term and "makes neither sense nor syntax." ('Experiments in Education' (Ithaca, Ny, 1942) (P - 75).  

Broadening the scope of comparative literature Henry Gifford explains in detail:

The study of literature is increasingly bracketed with that of philosophy and history. It has always been difficult to set precise limits round the subject, and more and more other disciplines have thrown their shadows across literary studies. To interpret the great works of the past or for that matter of the present, the most multifarious knowledge will be required. Nearly all the subject taught in a faculty of arts will be laid at some time under contribution.

According to Posnett:

Comparative literature means the general theory of literary evolution, the idea that literature passes through stages of inception, culmination and decline.

According to Rene Wellek:

Comparative literature will study all literature from an international perspective, with a consciousness of the unity of all literary creation and experience (Discriminations, p. 19).

From the above discussion, we can conclude that the concept of comparative literature should be taken neither by too narrow, nor by too comprehensive out look. A
comprehensive and workable methodology will facilitate the comparatists to reach their goals. Otherwise he is prone to delusions more easily than other research scholars or critics because comparative literature has not yet fully established or founded a viable means of comparative study. Rene Wellek goes to the extent of saying:—

Comparative literature is still a controversial discipline which has not yet been able to establish a distinct subject matter and specific methodology (Discriminations, p.1).\(^{14}\)

So, boundaries of comparative study must not be defined so that it may not distract from its way to uncontrolled extension. A comparatist should not depend upon comparison but only also make use of description, characterization, interpretation, narration, explanation and evaluation of different works.

Manikar has explained the phenomena in different words by saying:

Comparative literature studies can include the application of the usual aesthetic values to a literature an understanding of the different literary movement and tendencies of an age, studies of themes and idea that appear in different literatures, and finally the study of genre, of structures and patterns. But perhaps the most important of all are the literary relations.\(^{15}\)

So in comparative literature, as a subject of study the comparatist must keep a balance between expansion and concentration, make use of new tools and techniques for analysing the features of a work, get benefit from the insight formed in the discoveries of other disciplines such as Anthropology, Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology, History of Art and most important of all in this field - Linguistics, Bijay Kumar Das while giving his opinion about the nature of study of comparative literature remarks that:

Comparative literature analyses the similarities and dissimilarities and parallels between two literatures It further studies themes, modes, conventions and the use of folk-tales, myths in two different literatures or even more.\(^{16}\)

Comparative literature is a study of relationships between two or more literatures. For example - English literature, American literature, Canadian literature, Australian literature, Indian English literature and Caribbean literature - all are written
in English language. The study of comparative literature encompasses all these literatures in its scope.

Now let us think of the prospect of comparative literature in India a multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi religious country. The critics argue that Indian literature though written in many languages yet it is one. The fact is that Indian culture has a certain kind of unity in diversity. This unity in cultural, social and religious background of Indian society, makes all literatures to be one i.e., Indian. Here the views of R.K. Gupta and Priyalakshmi are worth quoting:

If languages were in fact the decisive factor in determining the unity of a literature, then literatures written in a single language but in different nations would be regarded as one not as many literatures. But we know that this is not to be the case, English is primary vehicle of several national literatures - British, American, Canadian and Australian to name just a few and also a secondary vehicle of literary expressions in many countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. If there can be several national literatures written in a single language, there can also be single national literature (including Indian literature) written in several languages. 17

The ultimate truth is that it is not language that renders unity to a literature/literatures rather the social, cultural economic, philosophical and religious movements and political environments play their role in this concern. Uniformity of theme is one of the main factors among Indian regional literatures. Language is a cultural phenomenon conditioned by its locale and socio-historic forces that are in operation through ages.

Every literature has its own specific character of form, style, images, symbols, nuances and associations etc. Having this thing in view, we realize the fact that French literature is dissimilar from English literature, from German literature and Russian literature. Similarly, if closely seen Bengali literature differs from Marathi, Tamil or Hindi literatures. They are not different just because the fact that they are written in different languages but because the fact that all these literatures developed under the influence of different socio-historic environment. There are many similarities and dissimilarities among them. For justification, Bijay Kumar Dass quotes Sunit Kumar
Chatter Ji and Dr. Radha krishnan respectively:

1. A fundamental unity does prevail in all Indian literatures types, genres and expressions among all the medical and modern literatures.

2. These is unity of outlook as the writers of different languages derive their inspiration from a common source or face more or less some kind of experience, emotional and intellectual.\(^\text{18}\)

Even Tagore and Sisir Kumar Das give emphasis on internal unity/uniformity in diversity in Indian literatures. The fundamental principle in comparative study is based upon the inter relationship between two or more than two literatures. The most essential aspect of comparative literature is the problem of method of studies. Comparative Literature can be studied fruitfully and purposefully in Indian context under the following heads, sources, themes, myths, forms, movements and trends etc.

Movements and Trends during the composing period should be given equal weightage while comparing any two literary works or literatures.

Comparative literature demands the most multifarious knowledge, world wide farsightedness, comprehensive awareness, unbiased critical sensibility, meticulous susceptibility from the comparators to literary works or literatures so that he may collect the fact about sources, forms, themes, myths and movements and trends and vividly.

He should not waste his energy on the trivial, banal or pap material.

(i) The Bhakti movement strongly influences almost all the regional literatures of India during he middle-ages It had deep impact on Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi and Oriya and many more regional literatures of our country. It brought Hindus and Muslims closer. They began to live together. Cooperation and toleration developed among two religious.

(ii) Yearning for freedom from the foreign yoke during the 19\(^{th}\) century, has its profound impact on all the regional literatures of India. Patriotic songs were composed and sung. Influence was found in every form of literature, poetry, novel, drama etc.
(iii) Four Varunas in Indian society, especially in Hindu religious scriptures have been in operation for centuries. After the advent of Sikhism, the Sikh Gurus tried their best to equalize the human beings. Being the children of one God, Guru Gobind Singh while creating Khalsa Panth in 1699, created a casteless society. Since then untouchability has been a recurring theme in various regional literatures including Indian English literatures.

(iv) Due to religious thinking partition of the country had an important effect in determining the theme of several regional literatures especially novels. Indian English literature such as - Train to Pakistan by Sh. Khuswant Singh -'A Bend in the Ganges by Malgonkar - The Dark Dancer, by B - Rajan - Sunlight on a Broken Column, by Attia Hussani - The Rape, by Raj Gill and Azadi, by Chaman Nahal and so on.

(v) Myth is an other important element in different regional and national literatures. Myth forms an excellent area of comparative study in Indian literatures especially the religious ones. Hindu puranic literatures and Sikh scriptures have hundreds of mythological characters Sikh Gurus, Bhagtas, Bards, Bhai Gurdas and Bhai Nand Lal have made much use of them:

Comparative literature’s a relatively is a new discipline but it is a happy augury that most of the Indian universities have included it in Master's Degree curriculums. (V.R.N.P. Prasad’s, Essay: The Concept of Comparative Literature in the Indian Context). 19

English being international language will prove very helpful in this tremendous task. English Departments of our universities can prove beneficial by Translating regional literatures into English. In this way, widening the scope of comparative study of different Indian literatures on national and international level. Comparative literature has been a part of syllabus at post graduate level at various universities. Thus broadening the scope of comparative study these universities may facilitate the task of literary criticism. Moreover, Indian English literature can be compared with Anglo American literature. Ancient Indian critical theories can be studied at par with western critical theories. Rasa-Dhvani theory can conveniently be compared with Reader - Response theory of the West.
At last we can quote the hopeful views of Henry Gifford: for the progress of comparative study:

On the one hand, the reciprocity between national literatures is constantly growing; and more and more a common fund is being built up on which writers in any language may draw. The master pieces that have hitherto stayed the possession of one people are becoming available to the world.  

I am hereby taking the comparative study of three significant poets of 16th and 17th century A.D. Firstly, the Bhattas have eulogized the first five Sikh Gurus in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. Secondly, the works of Bhai Gurdas are also subjected to the eulogy of six Sikh Gurus (from Sri Nanak Dev Ji to Sri Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji) and interpretation of the different concepts of Sikh theology. The bards have used classical Punjabi. Their language, more or less is similar to the language used by the Sikh Gurus and the saints whose Bani is included in Sri Guru Granth Sahib. The third poet taken for comparative study is Bhai Nand Lal who has also praised the Sikh Gurus and their doctrines and principles of Sikh theology. He has been devout Sikh of Sri Guru Gobind Singh Ji. He has eulogized all the ten Sikh Gurus. Most of his works are in Persian.

The poetic style, meters and language similarities and dissimilarities all compared and contrasted. Bhai Gurdas used the medieval Panjabi of the Majha dialect. All the three poets have a single motif i.e to praise the Sikh Gurus and preach the Sikh theology. Though they have a single aspect of their study i.e. eulogy of Sikh Gurus yet differences are calculated in their approach to praise their patrons. Thus, the research work, propounds an interesting comparative study of the works of poets referred above.
References

3. Ibid, p. 22.
10. Ibid, p. 28.