Indira Gandhi
National Open University
School of Humanities

MEG-15
Comparative Literature: Theory and Practice

Block

1

INTRODUCTION

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Comparative Literature is the subject of choice for those who have a deep love for literature and wish to study it in depth but without being confined to the boundaries of a national or linguistic tradition. When we view literary forms and genres and the various movements in the framework of a global perspective, practitioners of comparative literature affirm that we not only gain a more profound perception of their rise and evolution but also see how creative works from different parts of the world refer to and connect with each other – not only within that nation or linguistic area itself but also across cultural and linguistic borders.

Students of Comparative Literature find that they are led into the realms of literary theories and criticism along with an inter-disciplinary thrust that encourages them to explore the relations between literature and other subjects like philosophy as well as the other arts. As such, it offers them the opportunity to continue with their own area of interest while engaging with questions pertaining to literature and culture which is truly international.

It is a thriving discipline with particular significance to the Indian subcontinent with its multiplicity of languages and rich, diverse heritage. With our wealth of languages and dialects and their corresponding literature (oral and written), India and Indians are no strangers to the notion of 'comparitiveness'. I believe that we have the comparative - and the translation – germ in our very genes!

A study of comparative literature enables a student to consider the distinctions between what different types of comparisons are possible and what are in practice. It also helps them to decide to which type a comparison between two authors or texts belongs as well as to determine how to arrive at that conclusion. In addition a student of comparative literature, should, at the end of the study, be in a position to consider whether there are different degrees of comparison – is one work a close following of an earlier text? Or is it only a general imitation incorporating the different elements of that text? Or does it bear a perhaps unintended, unconscious resemblance to another text which is nevertheless unmistakably present?

A natural corollary to this is that students of Comparative Literature students also gain a deeper understanding of cultural differences and similarities and their inter-relatedness. This sort of an all-encompassing, tolerant and perhaps compassionate perspective is a great asset in these times of a globalised marketplace. While there is great scope in the outside world for students of this discipline, what is more to be valued is the insights that they will gain by such a study, leading to the awareness that we are all one under our skins and that, increasingly, it is the faith of humanism that will save this world from a fundamentalist-driven catastrophe.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This Block will initiate you into the idea and theories of Comparative Literature, trace its development, outline the historical and philosophical context and offer perspectives through which world literature can be viewed. You will see how the comparitivist uses his/her lens to interpret, make connections and transform the reading experience into a wholly new way of 'seeing'. The Block will take up several texts for discussion in order to exemplify the theories on Comparative Literature that have been discussed, to see fascinating parallels in works and writers who are far removed in space and time. The Block will also give an overview of trends and literary movements and the impact of certain Western trends on Indian writing.

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UNIT 1 WHAT IS COMPARATIVE LITERATURE?

Structure

Words put in bold type throughout the text of this unit are explained in 1.9 in the Glossary.

1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will serve to initiate you into the discipline of Comparative Literature. After studying this unit, you should be able to consider the following distinctions: What are the different types of comparisons that are possible and are in practice? How does one determine to which type a comparison between two authors or texts belongs? Are there different degrees of comparison, such as a close following of an earlier text, a general imitation of the different elements of a text or an unintended, unconscious but unmistakable resemblance to another text? You will also be able to see literature from different ages and various countries as being a part of World Literature.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Most of us have a general idea of what literature is, don't we? Literature, as a verbal representation of human experience, is an elemental act for the writer, who seeks self-expression. For the reader, the act of reading a literary work, to begin with, may be a simple, unorganized response to the narrative, the way of rendering an experience; the act of reading begins to sharpen when the reader becomes aware of the special effects created by striking literary features. When you develop a taste and sensibility, you grow as a reader and begin to perceive patterns, recurrent features and motifs and recognize in them the expanding horizon of literary representations, not only in the literature of your region, language or community, but in the wider spectrum. My dear learner, you can perceive now the **gestalt** or the emerging shape of your own development, not only as a literature student, but as a comparatist,

which you have become, without perhaps knowing it, in the act of increasingly cognizant reading. This unit will help you to become an informed reader.

1.2 ORIGINS, DEFINITION AND SCOPE

The Latin term '*comparativus*' was in use from the 16th century (Wellek, 1970 1). Early in the 19th century the combination *litteraturecomparée* came into vogue in France and was given currency by Abel-François Villemain in Sorbonne (Wellek, 1970 9-10). In English, the combination 'comparative literature' occurs for the first time in a private letter of Matthew Arnold in 1848 (Wellek, 1970 3). In his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford (in 1857) Arnold underscored the connections perceivable between literatures of various countries (Bassnett, 1993 1).

The famous German writer Goethe coined the term *Weltliteratur*in (1827). Goethe observed that "different nations acknowledge each other and their respective creations" and "in this sense [a universal world literature] … has existed for a long time" (cited in Birus 13). Goethe even declared, "national literature does not mean much at present, it is time for the era of world literature and everybody must endeavour to accelerate this epoch" (cited in Birus 21). Was Goethe thinking of world literature in quantitative terms (i.e. literatures of the entire world) or in qualitative terms (i.e. "the best examples from all literatures from different epochs and regions")? (Birus12). Again, did Goethe unwittingly equate 'world literature' with 'European literature'? Birus emphasizes the **catholicity** of Goethe's view, which foresaw the developments of multitudes of European and non-European literatures in the future and even included popular literature. (Birus 21, 15). What this essentially means is that there should be a blurring of boundaries demarcating literatures as from such and such countries or classical and popular.

Invoking Indian Aesthetics, Amiya Dev says, "We are informed readers, *rasikas* of the active kind that put their readings together into possible patterns. It is out of these patterns that a system may emerge. And since the patterning is involved with more than one literature, the system may be called comparative literature" (2011, 17).

As Susan Bassnett, the British scholar and historian of comparative literature says, most of us "do not start with comparative literature, but we may end up with it, in some way or other, travelling towards it from different points of departure" (1993 1).

Let us take an example: When we read an English version of the *Ramayana*, we may be naturally impelled to think of Valmiki's epic in the original or Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas* or Kamban's *Ramayana* in Tamil. Even *Amar Chitra Katha* booklets, on the myriad characters and stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, may stimulate us to go to the literary versions of the epics. If we are more critically minded, we may be curious to read contemporary rereadings/ revisitings of the primal Indian epics in, say, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni* (written from Draupadi's point of view; discussed in Block 7, Unit 2) or M.T. Vasudevan Nair's Malayalam novel *Randamoozham*, *Second Turn* in English, (written from Bheema's point of view) or Shashi Tharoor's comic and political rendering of the *Mahabharata* in *The Great Indian Novel*. That is why Bassnett is right in observing that "once we begin to read we move across frontiers, making associations and connections, no longer reading within a single literature but within the great open space of Literature with capital L, what Goethe termed *Weltliteratur*" which means 'world literature'(1993, 2).

So, does it mean that the moment you think of two related items it makes for comparative literature? Ah, dear learner, therein lies the catch. Sounds so easy, so simple, but when it is undertaken as a serious critical endeavour, it calls us not to just remain a general reader but to evolve and become a trained one who must traverse through complex linguistic, national, generic, **historiographical** terrains!

Has there been an overdose of facts and references?! Take a moment to catch your breath and read the previous paragraphs again before attempting the activity given below.

Activity 1

How do different versions of the same story affect our view of the story? Try to read some of the texts mentioned above or any other that you can think of where the story is told from different perspectives or by different people.

1.3 COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AS AN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINE

It is one thing to be enthusiastic about Comparative Literature and quite another to be instituting it in universities, teaching it by evolving methodologies of comparison, identifying its jurisdiction and setting up principles of validation; in short, being a theorist of Comparative Literature.

By the late 19thcentury, Chairs of Comparative Literature were being established in universities in Europe and the US, giving it an academic status (Wellek, 1970 3; Bassnett, 1993 22, 34). In the 20thcentury, especially in the early decades, because of the political and cultural changes in the Continent, many European scholars, reacting against narrow nationalism and consequent literary isolation, moved to the US. They aspired to seek larger contexts in a new international perspective "for tracking motives, themes, types, etc in various literatures" (Bernheimer 39).

What was the task assigned to Comparative Literature as an academic discipline and what were the governing methodologies of various schools which soon emerged?

Paul Van Tieghem, of the French school, distinguished between 'Comparative Literature' and 'General Literature.' The former is "confined to the study of interrelations between *two* literatures while 'general' literature is concerned with the movements and fashions which sweep through *several* literatures" (Wellek, 1959 283). Fernand Baldensperger, leader of the School, had no use for comparisons which did not involve "'a real encounter' that has 'created a dependence'" (Wellek, 1970 16). The French insistence on two elements ('*etudes binaires*') banned many prospective areas of comparison as "exclusion zones" (Bassnett, 1993 27-28). You can realize the anomaly for yourself when you are told that French and German authors can be compared, but not a Canadian and a Kenyan, for the latter two write in English (Bassnett, 1993 28). Another problem ensuing from the French dogmatism is the reduction of comparison to a study of sources and influences, causes and effects, ignoring the totality of a work of art (Wellek, 1959 283-285). Further, the approach was author-centred and hence excluded oral literature, anonymous literature, folk literature, etc.

The rigidity of such an approach, coupled with the tendency to dominate, precipitated what Wellek famously called 'The Crisis of Comparative Literature' in 1959.

Activity 2

Make an outline of the issues that brought about the crisis of comparative literature.

The American School of Comparative Literature came up in the 1960s as a more liberal school, pursuing the study of the relationship between literature and other areas of knowledge, arts and belief. H.H. Remak, its leader, suggested that influence studies should focus on "what was *retained* and what was *rejected* and *why*; and *how* was the material absorbed and integrated" (cited in Bassnett, 1993 32). The school gave prominence to thematic parallelism rather than historical and generic aspects (Bassnett, 1993 31). Thus, while the "Old World 'comparative literature'" emphasized documenting sources of influences in terms of national consciousness, the "New World 'comparative literature'" saw its task in "transnational terms" (Bassnett, 1993 34).

Since the 1970s, Comparative Literature has developed certain important theoretical concepts. Discovery of "**analog** and parallel processes of literary evolution" helps to explain "historical and social laws of universal validity" (Villanueva 1-2). Analogy, contrast, reception and influence are the nodal points of comparison in a systematic juxtaposition of phenomena from different literatures (Venugopal 31). Claudio Guillen has alerted us to the possible confusion between influence and textual similarities, asking the comparatist to study how the transfer takes place (Venugopal 38-41). Ulrich Weisstein (1973) has called for a nuanced study of 'influence' and 'reception' leading to 'survival.' He has also noted the phenomenal increase of interest in the theory and practice of translation, which he puts under influence and reception (1984 180).

We also see the expansion of literary theory into the larger theoretical realms of social sciences since the 1980s, which started to colour Comparative Literature. The rapidly changing contours of the discipline since the 1960s so alarmed the scholars (most of them European exiles and emigrés in the US during the inter-war and post-war period) that the situation called for periodical reports on the issue of 'professional standards': Harry Levin's in 1965, Thomas Greene's in 1975 and, finally, Bernheimer's in 1993 (vide Bernheimer 1995).

Activity 3

Make a chart of all the critics mentioned in the previous sections and their corresponding views with regard to Comparative Literature. What is the history of assumptions about its goal and methodology in various parts of the world?

1.4 ANTI-EUROCENTRISM AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE: THE CHALLENGE OF POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND STUDIES

The impact of postcolonial studies started to dent theorizing Comparative Literature in the 1990s as it did literary studies in general. Bassnett took it head on in 1993 in Chapter 2 of her book *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction*. She cited Swapan Majumdar, the leading Indian comparatist's contention that the critical tools borrowed from the West are not necessarily suitable for the study of all literatures (38). She noted that African, Asian and Latin American critics too shared this perception; and specially identified the domain of periodization in Comparative Literature studies as heavily marked by a Eurocentric spirit.

Bassnett believed that the formalistic turn of European/Western Comparative Literature studies, with its deliberate avoidance of socio-economic or political issues and overlooking of factors of invasions, colonization, economic deprivation in the study of literature and literary connections, provoked a violent reaction in other parts of the world (1993 37). Hence she was critical of the depoliticization of literature and stated that "Comparative Literature … is a political activity, part of the process of reconstructing and reasserting cultural and national identity in a postcolonial period" (39).

Activity 4

Why has comparative literature been called a political activity? Can you think of any texts that bear out this assumption?

1.5 EUROCENTRISM – THE INDIAN PERSPECTIVE IN COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Ganesh Devy, in *After Amnesia: Tradition and Change in Indian Literary Criticism* (1992) and *In Another Tongue: Essays on Indian Literature in English* (1993), makes the following critiques:

- European, especially English, scholarship, superimposed a monocultural model of literary excellence on India, which has been multicultural and multilingual for centuries.
- Even the Indologists of colonial times ignored the modern Indian languages, which developed from early medieval times, from Sanskrit and Tamil respectively (1992 27) (discussed in Block 2, Unit 3).
- Such languages, which he calls *bhasas*, produced a rich literary repertoire over a thousand years, especially in the genre of *Bhakti* or devotional literature, which was an exclusive indigenous growth (1992 42).

Swapan Majumdar raises the issue of whether Indian literature is singular or pluralistic (2011 32). His observations are worth pondering:

- Political identity is not the sole determinant of a national literature.
- Indian literature is not "a mere compendium of several regional literatures" (2011 33). A scholar must start with "the most close at hand literature" as the core of his "comparative **praxis**" (2011 34).
- The English/European way of periodizing is incompatible with the quality of actual literary output in India. The Middle Ages, damned as the Dark Ages in the West, saw the prolific contribution of luminaries like the Alwars, Kabir, Nanak, Jnanadeva, Mira, Tulsidas (2011 35).
- The rich haul of literature from different parts spread through the circulation of copies, minstrels' singing, itinerant scholars moving between places, creating a comparative space (2011, 36).
- Sisir Kumar Das, through his comparative literary chronology *A History of Indian Literature 1800-1910* in 1991, empirically established that Indian literature is neither a unity nor is it all completely different each from the other. Remarking on the multilingualism, he showed that even in one work,

different languages and dialects were used, as in Sanskrit plays (19). Importantly, he highlighted the emergence of the style of 'Manipravalam,' in South Indian languages, resulting from a fusion with Sanskrit (20). A new language, Urdu, developed from the contact of Persian with Khariboli. On the issue of colonial encounter, Das considered comparative criticism initiated by Western Indologists as expanding the existing scope of comparative literary studies (21-24). It culminated in the call of Rabindranath Tagore, in 1907, for 'Visvasahitya,' which he rendered as comparative literature and not world literature (25).

These have been discussed in greater detail in Block 2, Unit 3.

Take a moment to think about has been said in this section and read it again to get certain concepts clear in your mind before you go on to the next section.

Activity 5

Compare the way in which texts written in your mother tongue are similar to/ different from texts written in any other Indian bhasha. Is the difference to do with the way in which words are used, things described or does it evoke a different kind of culture altogether? How similar are the activities, perspectives, attitudes etc in the different texts?

1.5.1 Interliterariness

The issues on Comparative Literature in the postcolonial era have become more complex. Postcolonialism, by its very opposition to colonial domination, which erased the identity of a nation, a people, its culture by committing '**epistemic** violence' (to borrow a core phrase from Gayatri Spivak), asserted national identity as a counter move and helped a nation to place its own **canonical** works and alternative genres in opposition to European history and historiography. While this was a historical necessity since the rise of postcolonial studies in the 1990s, it was not without its problems. The abstract concept of nation and national unity was unable to do justice to the concrete differences in terms of language, culture, literature, so obviously present in various regions. Hence the need for a sensitive understanding of a postcolonial resistance to European Comparative Literature, with its model of Genealogy, Thematology, literary history, literary criticism, genetic studies, influence and reception studies, canon formation, etc.

Activity 6

'Epistemic violence' is when a discourse is imposed upon a silenced group (the colonized) by the dominant group (the colonizer). Try to find examples of this from India's history where certain perspectives or attitudes were forced upon Indian society by those who colonized it.

'Interliterariness,' as a comparative tool, is detailed by Marian Gálik, drawing from Dionýz Durišin. 'Literariness' is the basic quality of all literature; it transforms itself into 'interliterariness' if its features "transcend the boundaries of individual literatures" in terms of "intensity, variability, mutual relations, or affinities" (Gálik 34-35). He cites, as examples, the treatment of the epic women across Euro-Asian literatures, such as Helen, Sita and Draupadi. Thus, 'literariness' concerns one region, its language; it becomes 'interliterariness' when it crosses zonal, regional and linguistic barriers and registers a pervasive presence with striking variations, depending on the cultural location in which a feature is absorbed, reused and recreated. For example, Valmiki's *Ramayana*, both in northern and southern

retellings, depicts Ahalya as languishing, living only on air (*vayupakshanirahara*) after being cursed for adultery by her sage husband; whereas another southern retelling (*Dharmalaya*) turns her into a stone (*silabhutva*). Kamban too, in Tamil, renders the curse similarly, drawing perhaps from ancient Sangam poetical versions of Ahalya's story (Manavalan 160-163). Surely, interliterariness is rooted in cultural doctrines and practices, here concerning a woman's body in patriarchal societies.

Amiya Dev brings in "the notion of interliterary process and a **dialectical** view of literary interaction" as a way out of the impasse of abstractions like unity, diversity and national literature (2002 23). Gurubhagat Singh's concept of "**differential multilogue**" denied the very idea of an Indian literature (2002 25). Dev, however, recognizes "a **sensus communis**" of a broadly cultural kind present wherein a comparatist must find his 'situs' or location of theory (2002 27). He underscores the existence of an interliterary condition in India, long before "its manuscript or print culture" (2002 29).

Has this all been rather heavy theorizing?! Pause here for a while, go back to the previous sections and read them again slowly. When you feel that you have grasped the basic concepts outlined there, do the activity given below.

Activity 7

What is the distinction between 'literariness' and 'interliterariness'? Try to find some examples of this by looking at texts/retellings.

1.6 GLOBALISATION VERSUS PLANETARITY

Gayatri Spivak, in her call for a New Comparative Literature, proposes a model of '**planetarity**,'

- It displaces Eurocentrism, Postcolonialism, neo-nationalism, and even cultural studies.
- It acknowledges "a definitive future anteriority, a 'to come'-ness, a 'will have happened quality'" i.e. "an open future" (6).
- Comparative Literature and Area Studies (founded in the US during the Cold War decades, i.e. since the 1950s, to study foreign 'areas' through excellent language competence and scholarly rigour) *can* work together in retrieving even countless indigenous languages (15).
- 'Collectivities' (whose existences have not been so far even recognized by the existing world order) will "cross borders … [and] figure themselves … as planetary rather than continental, global or worldly" (72).
- 'Planetarity' is "best imagined from the pre-capitalist cultures of the planet" (100).

Responding to Spivak, Bassnett(2006) avers:

- Planetarity is put "in opposition to globalization," which tends to impose the "same values and system of exchange everywhere" (3).
- But "the discourse of global flows" enables a comparison of exchange and transfer in literary and philosophical spheres (7).
- "Theories of cultural capital and its transmission can be a productive comparative method" (Ibid).
- Through translation, new ideas and genres have come into the tradition (9).

- Spivak is more concerned with 'to-comeness,' while Bassnett is with 'has-happened-ness' (7).
- Both of them foreground "the role of the reader" (Ibid).

Thus, we engage with the New Comparative Literature and its methodology of going past postcolonialism and even metropolitan culture studies and open the space for new imaginings.

Activity 8

You must have heard the term 'globalisation' a lot in recent years, specially in the context of travel, communications and trade. But did you know it can also be concerned with literature? Read the previous section once more and see how Spivak and Bassnett redefine the contours of comparative literature. At what points do they differ?

1.7 COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES

The most important finding of Bernheimer's 1993 report was that the term 'literature' may no longer be adequate as our subject of study as comparatists (42) because of "an increasingly apparent porosity of one discipline's practice to another" (41) (i.e. disciplines or subjects are no more separate tightly sealed compartments, knowledge from one seeps into the other). The space of comparison today involves, says Bernheimer, the following:

- between artistic productions usually studied by different disciplines,
- between various cultural constructions of their disciplines,
- between the pre- and post- contact cultural productions of colonized peoples,
- between gender constructions defined as feminine and those defined as masculine, or
- between sexual orientation defined as straight and those defined as gay,
- between racial and ethnic modes of signifying,
- between **hermeneutic** articulations of meaning and materialist analysis of its modes of production and circulation (42)

The old world contextualization according to

author

nation

period

genre

has been displaced in the expanded fields of discourse in the New World by

culture

ideology

race and

gender (Bernheimer 42)

The problem for comparatists is one of incorporating these new ways of reading and contextualizing.

Zepetnek has proposed a model which will modify the nomenclature 'Comparative Literature' itself into 'Comparative Cultural Studies and offers a definition of Comparative Cultural Studies as

…a field of study where selected tenets of the discipline of comparative literature are merged with selected tenets of the field of cultural studies … [and] is performed in a contextual and relational construction and with a plurality of methods and approaches, interdisciplinary, and if and when required, including team work.(2002, 262)

Gail Finney notes that today, students take pains to acquaint themselves with the theoretical apparatus of one or more "non-literary disciplines or bodies of thought," which, three decades ago, graduate students were ignorant of, preoccupied as they were with literary history and literary texts (36). She considers, this "hybrid program" as the order of the day in the 21st century (Ibid).

Has this been a heavy dose of the historical contexts in which comparative literature has evolved?! Do take your time to go back, re-read and reflect upon what has been discussed so far. Mark the key words/phrases in the comments of the scholars quoted above and see how they define Comparative Literature.

Activity 9

Jot down the various exercises recommended and undertaken by eminent comparatists, both in the West and in the East to make the study of comparative literature more meaningful and updated. Why do you think this was necessary?

1.8 LET US SUM UP

Comparative Literature was a Western European phenomenon, rising in the academia as a discipline early in the 20th century, after a sporadic presence in the 19th century. Of course, Goethe had proposed the idea of 'World Literature' as comprising various regions' literary productions, both written and oral, mainstream and popular. He had envisaged it as a future occurrence and not a dead past's fossils. That was the merit of his visualization. Early in the 20th century, Rabindranath Tagore had given a ground-breaking lecture in 1907 on '*Visva-sahitya*,' which he translated as 'Comparative Literature' and not World Literature. St.Beauve, in late 19th century France, had alerted the Europeans that there was not just Homer, but three wise kings of the East – Valmiki, Vyasa (both from Hindustan) and Firdousi (of Persia), who must be studied too.

- The ideal of World Literature was soon overrun by a zeal for National Literatures and the discipline of Comparative Literature developed a rigorous methodology to study the relation between 'the giver' and 'the receiver.' It focused on literary genres and literary history.
- Thus, influence and reception became its cornerstones.
- The negative aspects of such a focus were the French School's insistence on historical and factual links between the two items being compared and the resulting dogmatism of the Eurocentric spirit in general.
- The more liberal American school made room for the study of parallelism and interdisciplinary dimensions between Literature and other arts.
- The rise of postcolonial theory, feminism and gender studies, created by the 'Theory Wave' since the 1970s, mounted a challenge to the Eurocentric and

colonialist assumptions of Comparative Literature. A nuanced approach to nation and nationalism was seen to emerge. New genres emerged from non-European cultures. Western periodization was rejected and its canons challenged.

- Translation emerged from being a supplement to staking claim as a challenger to Comparative Literature since the 1990s, bringing into view works from African, Asian and Latin American countries.
- As a corollary, multilingual competence, the hallmark of traditional Comparative Literature, sharply declined.
- The flipside of this is the sharp awareness of conceptual discourse from social sciences among literature scholars.
- This methodological shift accounts for the turn towards cultural studies in Comparative Literature, which is the central focus of recent theorists.
- The model of West versus East, European versus non-European is being replaced by the one of Northern and Southern hemispheres.

Since René Wellek's "The Crisis of Comparative Literature" (1959), some milestone critiques have identified newer formats for embedding Comparative Literature, some of which we have tried to examine earlier in this unit.

1.9 GLOSSARY

1) Gestalt – a structure or pattern, etc that arises in an act of perception of an object.
2) Catholicity – liberal outlook, not a narrow parochial view; universality.
3) Historiography – writing of history based on critical interpretation of sources.
4) Analog – a person or thing seen as comparable to another.
5) Praxis – is the process of the practice of an idea, theory, music, etc. That is, you don't understand an idea unless you know how it is practiced.
6) Epistemic - relating to knowledge or the conditions for acquiring it
7) Canonical – a canonical literary work means a work that is distinctively representative of the literature of a language. A canon usually is a list of literary works identified as such, which is held up as the yardstick or gold standard of excellence to measure other works. Often canon is determined by historical and political factors, leading to the domination of one canon over other works.
8) Dialectical - the dialectical method is a discourse between two or more people holding different points of view about a subject but wishing to establish the truth through reasoned arguments.
9) Differential multilogue – 'differential' suggests rejection of the claims of a single point of view. Multilogue is the opposite of monologue (which means one single perspective). Multilogue can be viewed as a further expansion of dialogue, which has only two points of view. In differential multilogue multiple perceptions are accepted as equally viable or possible.

10) Sensus communis – a Latin term equivalent to the English term 'common sense'. Common sense is basic awareness and the ability to judge, which most people are expected to share naturally. By this, literary awareness and judgement is sensus communis.

11) Planetarity – a sense of bonding inspite of the diversity.

1.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) What is the relation between the study of literature and Comparative Literature?

2) Explain the three categories of General Literature, World Literature and Comparative Literature.

3) Briefly describe the origins of Comparative Literature in the West.

4) What are the main principles of the French School of Comparative Literature? How does the American School differ from the French School?

5) Discuss the importance of the following rubrics under which various literatures are compared:

   - Influence and genetic studies
   - Reception, impact and survival studies
   - Genre and literary history
   - Interliterariness

6) What is meant by 'Eurocentrism'? How did it shape Western Comparative Literature?

7) Analyse the reactions to Eurocentrism after decolonization and comment on Postcolonial Theory and its privileging 'nation' and 'nationalism.'

8) What are the new ways of contextualizing literary texts, which have come up after the 'Theory Wave' of the 1970s?

9) On what grounds do the Indian comparatists reject/challenge European/Western Comparative Literature?

10) How does cultural studies impact on Comparative Literature studies?

1.11 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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UNIT 2 THE PRACTICE OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Structure

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The previous unit discussed concepts in comparative literature. Now we will apply those concepts and by the end of this unit, you will be able to perceive how theorists of the field compare, study and analyse the different strands of multiple texts. You will therefore be in a position to try the same with texts of your choice either in different languages or within the same language. You will also be able to see what points are taken into consideration when making such a study.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit we surveyed the area of comparative literature from a historical and theoretical point of view. In this unit we will try to look at various texts and put those theories into actual practice. We will apply various concepts to selected texts and through a detailed discussion, show how the comparativeness of literary texts can be discerned and drawn out. The texts will cover a range of writing from over the world. Do remember to refer to the previous unit now and then in order to understand the concepts better.

2.2 SOPHOCLES' *OEDIPUS THE KING* AND KALIDASA'S *SHAKUNTALA*

Let us see how comparative literature works in the hands of a well-informed practitioner of the discipline. David Damrosch, a renowned comparatist, has made a fascinating study of Sophocles' Greek play *Oedipus the King* and Kalidasa's Sanskrit play *Shakuntala* in his book *How to Read World Literature* (2009). Note here, he does not claim that the later Indian writer (4th or 5th century) knew anything of the Greek dramatist, his indebtedness being exclusively to "Indian epic and lyrical traditions rather than to any foreign influences" (48). And yet as masterpieces of world drama, the two plays lend themselves to meaningful comparison at several

levels: starting with fundamental themes; parallelisms in the situation of their respective protagonists; Oedipus and Shakuntala as outcastes; Oedipus and Dushyanta as ignorant actors; to the patterns of imagery and similarities in character and plot-making.

Taking the Aristotelian route to critique the dramatic action, Damrosch invokes the well-known critical dilemma: does a protagonist fall due to a flaw in his character (hamartia) or due to fate? (52) He bases his comparison in the cultural contextualisation of both the plays. Both plays are "products of ancient, polytheistic societies," which believed in innumerable gods playing active roles in human lives. Damrosch startlingly claims that in his "emphasis on fate over individual ability, Sophocles is closer to Kalidasa than to many later dramatists in the West" (Ibid). Further, he points out that the Greek play is cast in the tragic mode, while the Indian play has a happy ending, not discounting the suffering Shakuntala undergoes because of the amnesia her husband suffers in the interim period, thanks to a curse by "an angry spirit named Durvasas" [sic] (49). Damrosch here, as a comparatist, skillfully employs the Greek dramaturgical techniques of "recognition and reversal," as detailed by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, in striking a parallelism between Oedipus coming into knowledge and Dushyanta to realisation of the truth "by the sight of his signet ring brought by the fisherman" (52).

Damrosch does not stop with finding similarities; he moves on to show the variations in the art of Sophocles and Kalidasa, especially in character and plot. While "action" is the lynchpin of Western drama, the Indian play seems to downplay it (56). With several important events occurring off stage in Kalidasa, the focus is on being more lyrical and psychological than dramatic (55). The three unities (Aristotle again!) – of time, place and action – are strictly followed by Sophocles, whereas, in Kalidasa, there is a freewheeling of time, running to several years. The representation of violent action on stage is virtually absent in *Shakuntala*; in Oedipus,the king blinding himself is gruesomely presented. Damrosch concludes that Kalidasa's literary space provides "a world of suggestive indirection rather than dramatic action" (56). In terms of comparison at the sociological level, Damrosch notes that the stage in the Indian play is far more crowded than that in the Greek play. We have eight speakers in *Oedipus* while there are forty-four in *Shakuntala*, "not counting the assorted spirits who are heard as off stage voices" (54). The comparatist tries to account for this tendency of Kalidasa's in terms of the "densely populated Indian social world" (54).

You will see that, in this instance, the comparison stems not from influence or reception studies, but from a perception of parallelism and differential treatment of similar themes in two acclaimed classics of the world.

Activity 1

Do you think that the ending and the representation of violent actions on the stage can be related to the dramatic conventions of the two cultures? Look at other such works in both traditions to reason out an answer.

2.3 ADDISON, STEELE (*THE SPECTATOR*) AND PANUGANTI (*SAKSHI*)

As students of Indian literature, most of you may be aware that fictional forms like the novel and the short story emerged out of the colonial encounter the country had with Britain, through the introduction of English education and English literature

from school to college/university level. You may be interested to know that a genre like the essay, or more specifically the Periodical Essay too, percolated into our literary culture in the late 19th century. I specifically draw your attention here to the rise of the Periodical Essay in the Telugu language at the turn of the 20th century and how, in the hands of Panuganti Lakshminarasimha Rao (1865-1940), it attained a new dialogic form, shaped as it was by the Indian cultural ethos of the writer and the socio-political factors operating when he wrote and published his essays.

Here we have authentic comparative literature material. Addison and Steele (1677-1719 and 1672-1729 respectively) were the two major men of letters who crafted the genre of the Periodical Essay in English to perfection through the famous "Spectator" essays and, before that, the "Tatler" (started by Steele in 1709 and wound up in 1711).

Activity 2

At this point it may be useful for you to look up a brief history of English literature with particular reference to the 18th century, also known as the Augustan Age or The Age of Reason.

Panuganti, hailing from the coastal Andhra region, was exposed to English literature at school and college and went on to establish himself as a leading essayist in the Telugu language, next only to the reformer Kandukuri Veeresalingam.

K. Srilata Venugopal, systematically studying Addison and Steele's corpus of essays "The Spectator" (555 in number) and Panuganti's "Sakshi" (147 in number) in her book *A Comparative Study of "The Spectator" and "Sakshi"*(2006), locates the arrival of Panuganti's masterpiece in modern Indian literature, in the domain of Influence and Reception as propounded by Claudio Guillen and Ulrich Weisstein. The Telugu author consciously "imitated" the name, the schema, the critical temperament, the idiom and the generic features of the 18th century English Periodical essayists Addison and Steele. And yet, what we get in the Telugu essays is not just a "copying" but a "hybridization" of the English reflective essay and the Indian "*Kathakalakshepa*" tradition or religious and *puranic* discourse to the layman (9). The English essay was a product of the Enlightenment spirit of the 18th century Augustan Age, promoting reason and reflection while discussing contemporary issues on politics, religion, gender and sexuality, literature, manners, etc., and, thereby, aimed at educating the upcoming middleclass, which was affluent but lacking in refinement. Thus Addison and Steele had a moral purpose in forging this genre to perfection. Turning to India in the grip of colonial rule and European culture, we find the Telugu writer carefully handling sensitive political issues such as imperial rule, surrender of the zamindars and the upper class to English domination, the dangers of religious intolerance, the conduct of women and their obsession with fashion, caste divisions, need for social reform and veiled support to the emerging independence movement.

The English word "Spectator" is directly rendered in Telugu as "Sakshi," a term that is widely in use in various Indian languages deriving from Sanskrit. The significance of the title in both the cases is to make the writer an objective and critical observer of the goings-on in the world around him and comment on them. "Spectator" fitted Addison and Steele's purpose eminently because their social milieu offered enough material for their observations. In the case of Panuganti's choice, the term "Sakshi" does not stop at the social level, given his deep interest in the inherited Indian, specifically Hindu, philosophical tradition: a person can be in "sakshi bhava," a state of mind in which he is detached from his surroundings, he is

in it, not of it. Hence there is a cultural, even metaphysical, depth to the role of "sakshi" or "witness" that Panuganti plays.

Panuganti creates the Sakshi Club, following Addison and Steele's the Spectator Club. He peoples it with a range of interesting and idiosyncratic Indian characters from different social backgrounds. He gives them voices. Hence he is able to create a polyphonic atmosphere while looking at any issue.

The close proximity of interests between the English essayists and the Telugu essayist, which finds resonance in every aspect of the grid of comparative literature – be it genre, literary history, genetic link and influence study, reception and impact, assimilation and recreation – makes comparative criticism rewarding. Panuganti has even been called the "Andhra Addison"! (Venugopal 89).

Activity 3

Please read some essays in any other Indian language and see whether they show the same influences. Have they developed into a distinct Indian genre?

2.4 INTERLITERARINESS: THE STORY OF AHALYA

Interliterariness has been emphasized both by Indian and Western comparatists for examining different texts on the same plane and explaining certain literary or thematic features that appear with some variations.

Let us take the case of the story of Ahalya in the *Ramayana*. You will be surprised that although the basic story is the same, be it in the northern recension of Valmiki *Ramayana* or the southern one, or the Kamba *Ramayana* in Tamil, or the *Ramayana* in Malayalam, there are curious differences. Ahalya, wife of Sage Gautama, was seduced by Indra, king of the Devas in the guise of her husband, and was cursed by the Rishi when he came to know of the affair. She was redeemed when later Rama's feet touched her. This is the bare story. But Professor A.A. Manavalan, in his research work in Tamil *Ramakathaiyum Ramayanangalum* [*The Story of Rama and the Many Ramayanas*], has done an interesting comparative analysis of various texts of the Valmiki *Ramayana* and the versions in various Indian languages appearing in different periods, which, I would think, is an example of 'interliterariness' in comparative criticism.

We come to know that not all *Ramayana* present the story of Ahalya, and those which do, sharply vary on features such as the moral status of Ahalya before her seduction and after her fall. The ambiguity over whether Ahalya recognised Indra or genuinely thought he was her husband, the Rishi, appears to be a feature of the interliterariness. There are variations in the representation of the redemption of Ahalya in different texts from different parts of the subcontinent.

The most interesting feature, according to the comparatist A.A. Manavalan, is the account of what exactly was the curse on Ahalya. Let us briefly look at the analysis. The sloka from Valmiki's text in northern recension says:

1) "***vâyu*** *pakshâ nirâhâra tabyanti basmasâyini*."

The southern recension published by Gorakhpur Gita Press presents an altered line:

2) "***vâda*** *pakshâ nirâhâra tabyanti basmasâyini*."

Another text of southern recension, the Dharmalaya edition, reads:

3) "*vâyu pakshâ* ***silâbhûtva*** *tabyanti basmasâyini*" (Manavalan 160).

Among the three texts, the first word changes in one and two. That Ahalya was depressed and pale is a feature common to all. That Ahalya ate nothing but air as food is the sense conveyed by the words *vâyu pakshâ* and that she abjured food is conveyed by the word *nirâhâra* in one and two. But the substitution *silâbhûtva* in place of *nirâhâra* in the third text thus makes it problematic and helps to understand how an existing tradition of ideas in a particular area, region or literary culture alters a text received from another region. Manavalan, after examining various versions, both from the north and the south, is led to believe that the Ramayana version that was in vogue in the south around the 15thcentury had *silâbhûtva* as the textual feature – that is, Ahalya was cursed into a stone or turned into a stone by her husband's curse.

What is the justification or rationale for making *nirâhâra* (abjuring food) into *silâbhûtva* (turned into a stone)? The many *Ramayana* that came up in other Indian languages in subsequent times also present Ahalya as cursed into a stone (Manavalan 161-162). Kamban, in his Tamil epic, writes of the husband's curse: "He said to the delicate woman, 'Like a prostitute you too become a stone. Crashed she down as a rock in dismay'" (Manavalan 163).

Even Kalidasa writing in Sanskrit follows the same. Before Kamban there was a tradition in Tamil poetry which rendered the event in this way, as is seen in the Sangam poetical work *Paripadal.* Thus the story of Ahalya was widely known in the sub-continent even before this ancient Tamil poem. Kamban could have followed this tradition and rendered the version of Ahalya going without food as Ahalya being cursed into a stone (Ibid). The Telugu and Kannada *Ramayana* that avowedly follow Valmiki, still used this feature of Kamban's presentation and rendered the curse in terms of turning Ahalya into a stone. Perhaps, Manavalan surmises, since *vâyu pakshâ* itself suggests living on air, there was no need to repeat the idea in the term *nirâhâra*; instead it could be substituted by a new idea – turning into a stone.

This is certainly a fascinating instance of comparative criticism of interliterariness. In fact, contemporary feminists have taken strong objection to the patriarchal attitude to a woman's body – as an object to be treated as you please. There is even some resentment that at the touch of Rama's feet the inert Ahalya should come alive. Surely, interliterariness is rooted in cultural doctrines and practices.

Activity 4

Look for other stories from Indian myths, legends or folk tales. Are there different versions available? What are the similarities and where do the differences lie? Why do you think they have been told differently?

2.5 PLANETARITY: JOSEPH CONRAD'S *HEART OF DARKNESS*, TAYEB SALIH'S *SEASON OF MIGRATION TO THE NORTH* AND MAHASWETA DEVI'S *PTERODACTYL, PURAN SAHAY AND PIRTHA*

We spoke about the notion of Planetarity in the previous unit (section 1.6). How does one understand the working of the model of "Planetarity"? Spivak would like

to think of alternative "collectivities" (26), which can be imagined as coming into being in place of nations, continents, ethnic groups, diaspora, etc. She urges, "Let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open" (Spivak 26). For articulating her idea, she finds it useful to draw upon one of Derrida's critical terms - *teleopoiesis* - an imaginative making - which is different from the "mechanical convenience of mapmaking" (31), which opens into an undecidable future.

To illustrate her new paradigm in Comparative Literature, she looks at two "teleopoietic displacements of [Conrad's] *Heart of Darkness* in Arabic and Bengali" (31). Why Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*? It has been a much discussed work in colonial and post-colonial studies as representing the impasse that arises when a well-meaning white westerner, journeying into the Congo in the heart of Africa in colonial times, finds the "other," the Black, inscrutable or mysterious. Renowned Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe charged Conrad with racism (which was allegedly concealed in the veneer of enlightened reflection) and with misogyny, especially in the way Conrad's narrator Marlow presented the African woman (the mistress of the white Belgian trader Kurtz, who went "native" in the jungle) as a larger than life abstraction, creating fear and incomprehension in the white visitor coming in search of Kurtz. Chinua Achebe argued that Conrad was not so much worried by the difference between the white and the black but about the possibility, "the lurking hint of kinship, of common ancestry" (cited by Spivak 57). Spivak finds the story as signalling that "there was no other way for the British 19th century to give us another account of white going native black" (54). Her perception of Conrad's trajectory in the story is as follows: "If to 'go native' (take up the native way of life as opposed to the outsider's who has entered their world) means to enter the community of others' 'responsibly' so that responses can follow from both sides, this novel denies the teleopoiesis …" (55).

To demonstrate the working of her model of a New Comparative Literature, Spivak juxtaposes Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1970) and Mahasweta Devi's *Pterodactyl, Puran Sahay and Pirtha* (1995) with the English classic, calling them "transgressive readings" of *Heart of Darkness* (56). Spivak's intention is to show how "peripheral literature may stage more surprising maneuvers toward collectivity" (56).

Tayeb Salih's novel locates its actions mostly in Sudan in Africa. The anonymous narrator has just returned from Britain. There is Mustafa Sa'eed (the counterpart of Conrad's Kurtz), who narrates his life in Britain and "in the post- colonial state of Sudan" (Spivak 56). In this context it is "Britain that is the 'other place' in the novel" (56). The comparison comes with reference to two ways of entering the other space. Kurtz the colonial and Mustafa the post-colonial have different attestations while raising the issue of how to enter the space of another collectivity 'responsibly' (56). Salih's narrator, it must be noted, sees the British as just human beings, as much as the Africans are, driven by desires and fears and dreams; they are not the 'other'. However, the differences between the peoples do exist, no doubt narrowing (56-58), though he does not openly talk about it. He does not make any ideological statement on the issue, he leaves it open. Spivak also analyses, in some detail, the gender issues the novel explores without idealising African collectivities, given their problematic of treating their women as objects. Hence we get a much more concrete view of African women's positions and their resistance to male dominance unlike the total abstraction and stylization that Conrad offers, exclusively from a white European colonial angle of fear and distrust of the other (57, 60-62). In Spivak's view the "text signals the possibility of a women's collectivity 'to come'" (62).

Mahasweta Devi's novella *Pterodactyl* is not a rejoinder or counter-reading to Conrad, as can be said of Salih's *Season*. As a comparatist, Spivak puts it in the same grid and reads it as "the story of a journey into the heart (land) of the other" (66). Puran Sahay, a middle-class Hindu Indian journalist, travels to an aboriginal area. Puran is accepted by the Aboriginals, and it is they who play the subject, according to Spivak (67). His arrival is coincident with the coming of the rains to a drought-affected area. This event impels the Aborigines to include Puran into their "mythic and collective self-representation as the bringer of rain" (66).

How about the symbolism of the prehistoric bird in the title of the Bengali novella? Bikhia, an aboriginal lad, has drawn the picture of the pterodactyl. Puran, a non-aboriginal radical journalist, has come to investigate. He is the only non-aboriginal Indian who has been admitted into the uncertain 'presence' of the ancient bird. Spivak reads it as Puran being "taken into the collectivity of the aboriginal other" (68). Puran does not "go native" as Kurtz and Mustafa do; "it is the native who welcomes Puran, as the rain maker" (68). The novelist does not offer any naïve or false epiphany. Bikhia, having received his ancestral soul, pulls Puran outside and points to water running down a crack in the rock. Puran, however, is unable to comprehend anything. This very openness in rendering a crucial meeting is a 'responsible' way of entering another space, in Spivak's view (68-69). As a contrast to Puran's uncertainty and undecidability over the significance of his entry into the cave and the subsequent onset of rains, there is another Indian, Harisharan, with his English knowledge. Harisharan offers boldly to frame the Aboriginals' beliefs and ways of chronicling phenomenal occurrences invested with collective symbolism leading to creation of their mythology, in a post-colonial scholarly methodology. Thereby he tries to control the narrative, whereas Puran, by simply "letting go of control" enters the space of the other.

How does Spivak bring in the idea of planetarity here? She says, "the figure of the pterodactyl can claim the entire planet as its 'other' for it is prior to our thinking of continents" (80). When the continental drift took place in geological time and reached its current shape, the bird was "supposed to have become extinct" (80). Spivak regards this as a figure of a mindset that can make the "new" comparative literature work (Ibid). This mode of apprehending will reject the superficial use and misuse of the ancient and prehistoric into computer-generated images as in the case of Jurassic Park, argues Spivak (Ibid).

Thus, we engage with the New Comparative Literature and its methodology of going past postcolonialism and even metropolitan culture studies and open the space for new imaginings.

Activity 5

Look for stories/songs in English or Indian languages which speak of similar encounters and confrontation of cultures. How is the conflict resolved if at all? Is there violent collapse, reconciliation or simply resignation?

2.6 COMPARATIVE LITERATURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES: ERNEST MACINTYRE'S *IRANGANI*

In most recent times, Comparative Literature has aligned itself with cultural studies as we noted in the previous unit (section 1.7). Hence Comparative Literature has now new ways of contextualizing works, not just in terms of author or genre or

period, but in terms of debatable cultural issues. Let us look at the interesting instance of Ernest MacIntyre, a contemporary playwright born in 1934, who migrated to Australia in the period before the civil war between the Sinhalese and the Tamils (after decades of simmering distrust) broke out into the open in the 1980s. He is of mixed origin, being a Burgher (descending from Dutch colonials and Tamil natives.) Personally he did not suffer from any historical trauma caused by the racial strife back at home. However, using his vast knowledge of classical western and European theatre and his keen understanding of the ethnic strife that has beleaguered his homeland, Macintyre has written and produced several sensitive plays in English on intercultural problems since the late 20th century.

One of his very recent plays, published in 2012, is titled *Irangani*, subtitled "A Tragedy of Our Times, After the *Antigone* of Sophocles". We can use this example to show how Comparative Literature is thriving on the cultural crises raging all over the world! The dramatist himself sets the frame of reference for comparative criticism by making the Greek classical tragedy *Antigone* his intertext. He says in his Introduction to the play, '*Antigone* in ,' that "the affinity between the sounds 'Antigone' and 'Irangani' was the origin of the idea to give this play its name" (14). Hence, there is conscious "imitation" and "drawal" from Greek drama of the 5th century to begin with (14). He notes how the female protagonist Antigone has held the imagination of writers in diverse cultures in the 19th and 20th centuries, prompting them "to explore conditions of our times" (8).

The original context of the Greek play has an autocratic king who comes to power by sheer accident, because the other claimants die in an internecine war. His decree is to throw the body of Polynices, who waged a war for the throne of Thebes with his usurper brother Etiocles and died in the battle, to the violent vagaries of nature, with no ceremonials. One woman dares to defy King Creon, she is Antigone, the sister of Polynices, niece to the king. The king blocks her attempt to give her brother a proper family burial and goes on to order her execution, despite her being betrothed to his son Haemon.

MacIntyre creates out of this ancient story a critique of the way modern states operate, ruthlessly suppressing their own citizens, much more ruthlessly than the totalitarian states of Europe between the two World Wars. In his play he makes Sri Lanka the locale and conflates different incidents of insurgency by different racial groups in different periods against the state authority of post-independence Sri Lanka since the 1960s.

What MacIntyre does is to craft a modern-day tragedy centered round a woman, Irangani Jayaweera, who dares to challenge and admonish President Rajakaruna for not allowing her to give her brother Robert's body proper funeral rites. He was one of the thousands of activists/sympathisers of a revolutionary movement taking on the callous State apparatus. He was killed by the police at the height of the youth uprising (12). The irony is, after the brother and sister lost their parents they have been staying with the President, who is their maternal uncle! The President turns down Irangani's request because the body of his nephew shall be dealt with in the same way as those of other rebels. What King Creon considered legitimate two thousand years ago in Greece, the playwright comments icily, is echoed by the government of Sri Lanka in a decree by Gazette notification in 1983.

As a creative artist, he fuses all these events into one appalling spectacle of thousands of dead bodies of deprivileged Sri Lankans in the single body of the Greek "traitor" Polynices, in Sophocles' play. Similarly, he conflates the Greek figure of Antigone with the Sri Lankan female figure of Irangani, who tries to argue with the President of the State.

The President in the play (unlike King Creon in Antigone) points out that the rebels showed no mercy to a woman victim. He asks Irangani, "Your insurgents, your terrorists, have they returned bodies of those they brutally killed, to their families?" (74) A legitimate question, and Irangani accepts that it is heinous. She says she bleeds "from inside wounds like that" and taunts him: "Do you, for the wounds that you have inflicted?" (74); and the President replies in sophistry, "I bleed, even though my inflictions are legal" (75).

How does a comparative approach help us to apprehend the importance of a contemporary play like this? As Tötösy de Zepetnek has, in recent times, reiterated, comparative literature today must be comparative cultural studies. MacIntyre, as a Sri Lankan Australian, in using his diasporic cultural location, launches a critique of larger issues such as the onus of the modern State, its use and abuse of legal and military apparatuses and the adversarial positioning of dissent and rebellion within such a political framework. In his interview to the researcher Thamizhachi Thangapandian (aka T. Sumathi) in 2004, MacIntyre explains that we are no more concerned with broad political ideologies such as Communism and Socialism, rather we witness "how the issue of Human Rights presses against every State in the world, as a central issue" (Thangapandian 287). He declares that his play "moves across the range of Human Rights across all of the activities of the State" (Thangapandian 288).

On the plane of genre, Sophocles cast his story in the form of a tragedy and, typically with Greek drama, a family tragedy. MacIntyre too has cast his play as a tragedy with the protagonist sent to her death, but her dying also raises troubling political questions for the audience as it did when it was staged in Canberra, Australia and later in Sri Lanka itself. MacIntyre also invokes the Aristotelian concept of tragic catharsis, which is effected here by a clash of differential views on justice, legality and rights, stemming from violence and terror, so pervasive in our time (MacIntyre 7).

Activity 6

Think of a story that has been similarly adapted either as a short story, novel, play or film. How has the adaptation dealt with the cultural shifts? Does this affect the essentially human dilemma/conflict/situation that both deal with?

2.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we took up several texts for discussion in order to exemplify the theories on Comparative Literature that we talked about in the previous unit. We find fascinating parallels in works that are far removed in space and time (*Oedipus the King* and *Shakuntala*) like fundamental themes, the situation of their respective protagonists, patterns of imagery and similarities in character and plot-making. We also looked at the rise of the periodical essay in India as a result of the colonial encounter with the British in which one can see the essayist (Panuganti) going beyond just imitation (of Addison and Steele) to incorporate the very Indian element of *Kathakalakshepa*. The many versions of the Ahalya episode offer a glimpse into how culture and the collective consciousness can influence variations of the same story. An interesting discussion of the works of a Russia-born English novelist (Conrad), a Sudanese writer (Salih) and a Bengali litterateur (Mahasweta Devi) illustrates the post-colonial element and sense of centre and periphery (you will be reading more about this in Block 3, unit 2). The contextualisation of Comparative Literature in contentious cultural issues was brought out through the discussion of *Irangani*.

2.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Bring out the salient features of Damrosch's analysis of the works of Kalidasa and Sophocles.

2) How can we account for the differences in the representation of Ahalya?

3) Bring out the differences and similarities between the essays of Addison and Steele and Panuganti.

4) Examine how responsive and responsible the protagonist in each case is in responding to the space of the "other" in *Heart of Darkness* and *Pterodactyl*.

5) In these two novels, what is the protagonist at the beginning and what does he become? How does the notion of planetarity work?

6) Consider how starting with conscious "imitation" and "drawal" Ernest MacIntyre proceeds to question the condition of our times and to show how the presence of the "state" as the supreme political power haunts many citizens in their own country.

7) How does the play, *Irangani* foreground human rights across political and social spaces?

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UNIT 3 THEORY OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Structure

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will discuss different theories, their historical and philosophical context. The idea of the unit is also to show that theory is not something abstract and that it arises from certain situations, and that there is always a politics of theory where rival theories clash with each other and move forward. It will enable the student to understand that no particular theory is superior to the others, and that each theory has certain strengths and weaknesses.

At the end of the unit, the student should be able to state clearly as to why he or she prefers one theory over the other, offer a critique of the theory that appeals to him/her, and also give reasons as to why s/he finds another theory inadequate or unsatisfactory. The unit will encourage the students to think of theory on their own with the help of the background of different theories that are covered in the unit.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The general impression that one associates with the word “theory” is that it is abstract and philosophical, and that it is not easy to grasp. The truth is that theory does not exist in a vacuum. A theory is propounded by an individual or a group of individuals at a certain point of time and it can be seen that a theory is put forward because of the cultural and historical context.

We are all aware of the “How and Why” format - “how” is about the method and “why” is about reasons behind a certain issue. The “how” of Comparative Literature is covered by the methodology of Comparative Literature. The theory of Comparative Literature addresses the question of why. It is a philosophical question in a way. The way to answer this question is to find out the reasons which are to be found in the historical and cultural context. The answer to the reasons for studying Comparative Literature will in many ways define Comparative Literature through the method of arguments and reasons. Theory provides the conceptual foundation

of Comparative Literature, and at another level theory can be used to defend and justify the study of Comparative Literature. Essentially, to find out about a particular theory there is a need to go into the background of the idea and who are the people who propounded the theory or idea. It is also to be remembered that there is not just one theory of Comparative Literature, but there are many theories of Comparative Literature. This is why theory becomes interesting because we learn about different viewpoints on the subject.

3.2 THE THEORY OF "WORLD LITERATURE" OR "WELTLITERATUR"

Romanticism is an important movement in modern Western literature, especially of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. But it is only in Germany that it gave rise to the idea of "world literature", or as it is termed in German "Weltliteratur" ("Welt" in German means "the world" and "literatur" is "literature"). You have read about this in Unit 1. William Jones, an official of the East India Company in Calcutta, discovered Sanskrit literature and, thrilled by the richness of its literature, he translated Kalidasa into English. The great German Romantic poet Goethe read the translation of Kalidasa's *Äbhijnanashakuntalam*, and was bowled over. Goethe's contemporary and cultural philosopher, Schlegel, also came under the spell of Sanskrit literature. Both Goethe and Schlegel found that there is something that unites literary works from other languages and from other parts of the world, and that in ideal terms there could be and there should be an ideal world literature.

We have to remember that one of the aspects of Romanticism in Europe was that each nation believed that its cultural pinnacle is represented by its literature. So each country felt that its own national literature is unique and that it is superior in some way or the other to other national literatures, either in terms of its own antiquity or in terms of its own literary geniuses. The French found it difficult to accept that Shakespeare is a great writer of all nations and all ages because they could not bring themselves to accept that an English writer could be superior to the French literary heritage. The Germans on the other hand were reacting in their own way to the French. They preferred to praise Shakespeare as a genius rather than acknowledge French literature as the epitome of perfection.

We find in this example that there are many different strands in this idea of "world literature". First we have the Romantic Movement and its impact on writers and culture historians. Second, there is the accidental discovery of Sanskrit literature by some of the Englishmen working in India for a commercial company but who were interested in culture and they discovered Sanskrit and its literary riches on their own. The third is that the German writers were impressed by Sanskrit literature, especially Kalidasa. The fourth element is the national rivalry, which is a part of the Romantic Movement in Western literature. It is the combination of all these strands that gives rise to the idea and theory of "world literature". At this point, we shall not be discussing the different aspects of the idea itself, but only the context out of which it has arisen. This is to show that theory is rooted in history, in individuals and many a time in political developments as well. Theory is not abstract and it is not something very difficult to grasp. Theory is rather specific, rather concrete.

It is interesting to read what Indians feel when they read the praises of Europeans about Sanskrit literature. These can be brought under the heading of "Colonial Encounters", which can also be described as civilisational and cultural meeting points. This has shaped the view of Indians about literature, Indian literature, Western

literature as they were engaged unconsciously in Comparative Literature while involved in this exercise.

Activity 1

Jot down what it was that prompted European scholars to explore Indian Literature.

3.3 THEORIES OF COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

We are not here looking at all the theories of Comparative Literature. We shall consider some of the recent theories of the last half century and more, beginning with post-colonialism.

Before we deal with the post-colonial theory of Comparative Literature, we will need to know something that went before. Basically, the idea of Comparative Literature as we know it and as we are dealing with in this M.A. course of Comparative Literature is a Western phenomenon. We shall be looking at the possible theories of Comparative Literature in the Asian context as well, especially the Indian one. But the beginnings and later developments originate in Europe and in the United States.

At a very simple level, Europeans felt that they needed to study other national literatures in Europe to make better sense of their own literature. The notion of national literature arises from the political development of the emergence of the nation-state in Europe from the 15th and 16th centuries onwards in Europe. This also coincided and was sometimes preceded by the cultural development when Europeans in different parts identified themselves as English, French, German and Italian, and used their own languages for creative and other purposes, replacing the cosmopolitan Latin which prevailed across Europe in scholarly circles. The Roman Catholic Church also used Latin as the language of the Bible and of the church services. When Martin Luther led the Protestant revolt against the Roman Catholic Church, he also revolted against Latin. Luther translated the Bible into German to make it accessible to common people. So, nation, language, literature and culture become identified with each other, and this is at the root of the study of Comparative Literature in Europe.

This was also necessitated by the fact that at certain points of time, some common dominant ideas prevailed. The Romantic Movement and the ideas of universalism it inspired was one of them. In simple Comparative Literature terms, it will be sufficient to study the novels of a British, French, German or Russian author. But while doing a theory of Comparative Literature, it becomes important to identify a common thread or theme in the works themselves and the ideas that they inspire. The simplest form is to compare Shakespearean tragedy with that of the French playwrights of the classical period of the 17th century, which is to be found in the plays of Corneille or Racine. There is also the more general comparison between Greek tragedy and Shakespearean tragedy. That is, we will have to discuss the idea of tragedy as conceived by the Greeks. This is to be inferred in the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Similarly, we have to think what constitutes a modern European tragedy as seen in the plays of Henrik Ibsen.

It also can be extended to the study of novels across national literatures in Europe, both in terms of technique as well as the view of life expressed through the works. Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin writing on the poetics of Dostoevsky's novels, makes an observation about the technique that he thinks that Dostoevsky has used

in his novels. Bakhtin describes what he thinks is the chief characteristic of a Dostoevsky novel: "A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels." (Mikhail Bakhtin 1929). He follows it up with the statement: "Dostoevsky is the creator of the polyphonic novel. He created a fundamentally new novelistic genre. Therefore his work does not fit any of the preconceived frameworks or historic-literary schemes that we usually apply to various species of the European novel."

Bakhtin is arguing about the Dostoevskian novel in the context of the European novel. He is saying that a Dostoevskian novel is not like a Gustav Flaubert novel in France. He is not however arguing that Dostoevsky's is a unique Russian novel. He is speaking of the novel in general. He is confining himself to the aspect of technique, but he is implying that Dostoevsky is using what he calls the "polyphonic novel" to reflect the complex reality where many characters with their own consciousnesses exist along with the consciousness of the author. He could not have pinpointed the peculiarity of Dostoevskian novel without the European novel in mind, and without an idea of the theory of the novel.

Bakhtin is discussing the novel of Dostoevsky in the same way that we have been referring to Greek tragedy, Shakespearian tragedy or to Ibsenian trgedy. Though it appears to be a technique of Dostoevsky he is emphasising, it can be seen that Bakhtin's idea of the "polyphonic novel" is an indirect contribution to the theory of the novel. This becomes possible only in a Comparative Literature context.

We have to be careful and note that Bakhtin's view is only one of the many views about Dostoevsky and about the novel, and that there are other views to be considered. It is possible to discuss different theories of novel arising from different national literatures, and it becomes an exercise in the theory of Comparative Literature.

Activity 2

Make a note of the points raised by Bakhtin.

From the above, we can conclude that a theory of Comparative Literature could involve the discussion of the theory of tragedy, the theory of the novel, and lead to an elaboration of the historical and cultural contexts of tragic drama in classical Greece, in Elizabethan England and in modern Europe on the one hand, and the social and literary background to the theory and practice of the novel on the other.

This is one of the functions of the theory of Comparative Literature which arises from the study of plays and novels and poems from different countries and periods.

In the example we have discussed above about "world literature", there is an indirect discussion about the theory of literature as such in the Comparative Literature context. As a matter of fact, it is when we discuss the ideas and ideals of literature that seems to inform and enliven any national literature in different epochs that we seem to arrive at a better and more comprehensive theory of literature.

Four of the recent theories that have emerged in the context of the theory of Comparative Literature are post-colonialism, multi-culturalism, liberalisation and globalisation.

Activity 3

Read the previous section again and say how and why Comparative Literature took root in Europe.

3.3.1 Post-colonialism

The idea and theme of post-colonialism emerged because of the historical phenomenon of European powers dominating, politically and culturally, many of the Asian and African countries through military conquest or trade relations. When these Asian and African countries became politically independent, they continued with the literary modernism and its forms that came with the European colonial powers. The European Comparative Literature practitioners felt that they could not leave out the former colonies in their literary discussions because some of these colonised people were writing in the language of the colonisers, and others were using the literary forms of the colonisers in their own languages. The Europeans felt that their own literary discussion or discourse would become richer if the former colonised peoples' modern literatures were brought into the circle of study and debate.

What became a problem in post-colonial studies was the terms of relationship between the former colonisers and the former colonised, and the debate took place mostly in the western universities and many of the dominant scholars were from the West. The equation changed over a period of time when Comparative Literature scholars from Asia and Africa debated post-colonial Comparative Literature and showed how the former colonised people subverted the literary forms and expressions of the former colonisers. Literature during the colonial period was used by the people of the colonised countries as a political weapon to fight the coloniser. Pride in the nation, its literature and culture was part of the freedom struggle of the colonised peoples.

This movement which brought in the concept of national literature in the colonised countries also developed two other trends borrowed from European political and cultural trends. The first was Marxism and the second, feminism. From taking pride in the nation, it was realised that literature was also to be used to voice the agonies and aspirations of the oppressed classes within the colonised country, and this was represented by the Marxist trend in literature. At the same time, it was also seen that one of the ways to become modern was also to enable women to come out and join the work force as well as the political fight for freedom. This gave rise initially to literature with strong women characters, but this did not acquire the label of feminism until the 1970s when the feminist movement picked up momentum in the West. Marxism and feminism could easily become parts of Comparative Literature and its theory because the phenomenon of the oppressed sections of a society, including women could be studied across national literatures of Europe, Asia and Africa.

Post-colonialism studies could not have lasted too long as Asian and African countries moved away from their colonial experiences, and a few decades into their own independent existence, they had to confront other kinds of the literary and cultural challenges, which did not have the Western reference point. There is as yet no theory of Comparative Literature which discusses the literary equations between contemporary West and contemporary Asia and Africa.

Activity 4

Look at the two 'isms' – Marxism and feminism – and try to relate it to the literature being written in India (in English and in the bhashas).

3.3.2 Multi-culturalism

The Westerners, that is Europeans and north Americans, have entered a new phase because they were faced with a significant chunk of immigrants from other countries and these immigrants brought with them their own cultural histories. As migrants became part of the Western societies, they asserted their own cultural identities. This gave rise to the idea of multi-culturalism, which meant the study of literary texts of other cultures represented by the migrants. It was Comparative Literature in a new avatar.

One of the basic ideas of multi-culturalism has been that all cultural - which includes literary - traditions are to be treated on an equal footing, and there is no hierarchy about the value of each tradition. It is argued from the multi-cultural perspective that it did not matter that a particular literary tradition did not have an epic, tragic drama or novel. These are criteria imposed from the Western perspective. The texts of other cultural traditions have to be read on their own terms.

At its base, the theory of multi-culturalism was making the case for cultural pluralism in a democratic society. It was also a phenomenon and a theory that was confined to the United States and to a certain extent to Britain.

Activity 5

Look at how the concept of multi-culturalism impacts the idea of Comparative Literature. Even in India, there are so many languages, customs and religions. How does this bear upon the literature that is written in our country?

3.3.3 Liberalisation

The word 'liberalisation' is generally used in the specific context of economic liberalisation. It meant allowing foreign investors, manufacturers and traders into a country and removing the barriers that impeded such exchanges. It can be seen that 'liberalisation' in the sense of allowing things from outside the country has been continuously happening in the cultural sphere for instance, in Western popular music influencing young people and their music and musical tastes in Asian and African countries. And this was not a one-way flow. Music, especially from Africa – the roots of jazz are to be found in Africa – was a critical factor in Western popular music. The spread of jazz to countries like Japan show the complexity of how cultural forms travel from one continent to another and from one country to another. Similarly, Western classical music was taken up by the Japanese and Chinese, and Indian classical music found attentive listeners in the West. But the impact of liberalisation on literature and the study of Comparative Literature have not been examined sufficiently. Liberalisation in literature, like in music, has been at work in a quiet manner. For example, Hindi writer Nirmal Varma's novels and short stories have a distinct European flavour and tone which came from the personal experience of the writer and he used it effectively to make his own literary art. The other example is that of the Japanese writer, Haruki Murakami, whose novels and stories unabashedly reflect Western trends and tastes and techniques.

There is however a counter-argument in the context of liberalisation. The critics of liberalisation feel that allowing foreign manufacturers and traders into the country

would not only lead to economic slavery in a new form but it also poses a danger to the culture of the country. Some of the culture critics in Asian and African countries want to preserve and protect the country's cultural forms even as they concede the point that foreign investors and manufacturers and traders will add to the economic wealth of the country. Liberalisation on the one hand throws up a group of neo-nationalists who are opposed to the process of liberalisation, and on the other it creates radical cultural conservatives who feel the need to preserve cultural treasures, including languages and literatures, of their country.

In the context of liberalisation, Comparative Literature takes a new, even a backward, conservative turn where it is argued that different literary traditions are in danger of being swept away by the economic liberalisation, and that there is a need to fight back. In the face of liberalisation, the focus is on keeping the many literary traditions alive, each with its own distinctive identity.

Activity 6

What are your own views regarding the transference of cultural forms from one country/society to another? Write down your thoughts.

3.3.4 Globalisation

The corollary of liberalisation is globalisation. As the United States is the dominant power in the processes of liberalisation and globalisation, the satirical terms, "Coca-Colanisation" and "McDonaldisation" became buzzwords of criticism in the debates over liberalisation and globalisation.

One of the implications of globalisation for Comparative Literature is that when national boundaries are made irrelevant, what is the importance of national literatures which are needed to make Comparative Literature meaningful?

Paul Jay (2010) argues spiritedly about the complications in literary studies, including Comparative Literature, that have arisen as a result of globalisation. He notes: "…English literature (particularly the novel) is being produced by an increasingly transnational, multicultural group of writers, working in disparate parts of the world, whose work explores the intersecting effects of colonialism, decolonisation, migration, economic and cultural globalisation…Much of this work is either situated in the metropolitan West or involves characters whose experience shifts back and forth between the Western metropole and the formerly colonised countries from which their families came." And he cites the examples of the Booker-prize winning *The Inheritance of Loss* and Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Interpreter of Maladies* among other works.

Post-colonialism then takes the "transnational turn" but it does not abandon the national identity issue, and therefore of national literature. In the two Indian novels mentioned above, it is clear that though written in English, they are works of 'translation' at a deeper psychic and cultural levels. Of course, this is not an entirely unprecedented happening. Joseph Conrad's writing is peopled by characters from different countries floating in a metropolitan world. This is to be clearly seen in his novels *Under Western Eyes* and in *Nostromo*, and in his novella, *The Heart of Darkness*.

The Theory of Comparative Literature faces the challenge of grappling with globalisation and what it means for literatures produced in different languages. Do they display the homogenisation that is supposed to be the evil consequence of globalisation? Or do they retain their distinct identities while dealing with it?

Activity 7

Give examples from novels and short stories from any of the Indian languages with which you are familiar to show how liberalisation and globalisation are reflected in the literary works.

3.4 TRANSLATION

Translation is an integral part of Comparative Literature in a theoretical sense. Comparative Literature implies studies of texts from two or more different languages at a basic level. Even if one is a polyglot, and is conversant with the two or three languages of the texts s/he is dealing with, in practice, the different texts are being spoken of or written about only in one of the languages. You might know Marathi and Hindi, but if you are discussing a Marathi poem in Hindi or a Hindi short story in Marathi, or you are speaking in or writing about in English about the Marathi poem and the Hindi short story, you are engaged in a translation activity. The ideas and emotions, and the texture of the language are discussed in a language other than that of the text in question.

The question that comes up while dealing with the basic activity of Comparative Literature is the relationship between languages. It is a well-known fact that there might be similarities between languages but there are no exact mathematical equivalents between two languages. This should give rise to the perception that there is need for caution while discussing literatures and languages. Caution need not lead to scepticism about whether it is ever possible to understand the literary work in one language through the means of another. It is both possible and necessary and Comparative Literature thrives because the dialogue between languages and cultures is through translation.

The issue of translation is not confined to works of literature in two languages. It also holds good for a novel that is made into a film, even if both are in the same language. The verbalisation that is the basis of a novel has to be translated into images in a film. The narrative in words is not the same as the narrative in images. Some critics might even argue that the sequence of images in a film is not the same as the verbal narrative. You will read more about this in Block 7, Unit 1, on Shifting Perspectives.

Activity 8

Do the exercise of translating a poem or a short story from one of the languages you know into another. Then write about how you did the translation, what were the difficulties you faced, and what is the difference you find between the two languages.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we familiarised you with various theories of Comparative Literature. The changing world and the contexts of literature were also discussed in order to give you an idea of how society and political agendas can impact literature and interpretation. From the concept of 'weltliteratur' through postcolonialism and multiculturalism to liberalisation and globalisation, theories are propounded and developed, each with their strengths and weaknesses and relevance. By being equipped with these theories, learners can compare, judge or even evolve their own theories in the context of Comparative Literature. We also looked at translation and how it is an essential tool in the field of Comparative Literature.

3.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Use the example of the discovery of Sanskrit literature in European literary and intellectual circles, to try and think of a parallel phenomenon in India. In Unit 2 you saw how 18th century England influenced Indian writers. What do you think would have been the impact of English literature on Indian minds in the 19th and 20th centuries?

2) How did English literature in India impact the Indian literary scene? Did it lead to a comparison between Bangla and Tamil literatures (for example), with that of English and European literature? Did it lead Bengalis and Tamilians to rediscover their own literatures from a new perspective? You can think of other languages apart from Bangla and Tamil.

3) What do you understand by the term 'post-colonial' in the context of Comparative Literature?

4) What are your views regarding the charge that local cultural values are being diluted or destroyed as a result of economic liberalisation?

5) How does translation become a tool for Comparative Literature?

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UNIT 4 MODERNISM: THE WEST AND THE EAST

Structure

4.0 OBJECTIVES

After having gone through this Unit, you should be able to:

- Identify the various trends and strands of modernism(s) that developed in Europe at the turn of the twentieth century;
- Discuss the impact of the Western aesthetic movements on Indian Literature (and art);
- Explain the reasons for considering anti- colonial Indian literature as modern, and
- Illustrate how modernism and the freedom struggle went hand in hand in India and continued even after India became politically independent in 1947.

4. 1 INTRODUCTION

Indian literatures in pre-colonial India flourished in its various languages with their own moorings, idioms, traditions and systems. Sanskrit literature in general set the standard for all major languages with the exception of Tamil. Tamil, of course, had its own distinct identity in every respect. However, Sanskrit and Tamil interacted with each other profoundly and had a non-antagonistic influence on each other without threatening each other's individuality and uniqueness till the 1920s when the 'pure Tamil' movement set off the negative trend of viewing Sanskrit as an ' enemy' of Tamil, largely due to social and political reasons rather than linguistic and cultural compulsions. Historic truth and values were severely undermined or ignored in that period at the cost of rejuvenation of comparative scholarship on either side. Sanskrit itself lost its social status and functional value in the wake of English education in India. After the famous (or infamous) Minute

of Macaulay of 1832 became the guiding principle and the corner stone of Indian education, the influence of Sanskrit, Persian and other Indian languages with centuries-old traditions started to recede (see Block 3, Unit 2 Appendix for excerpt from the text of the Minute).

4.2 PRE-MODERNIST SCHOOLS: A BRIEF OUTLINE

Just as the ideas of a ruling class become the ruling ideas at every historical epoch, the language of the rulers or the ruling elite becomes the ruling language that shapes the thinking, taste, culture and other day to day communication of men, women and children. Literature too undergoes a change, major or minor, and its expression, language, the form, technique, style etc, get influenced by the ruling language. Though English was an alien language to Indians initially, the moment it became the language of rulers, administrators, teachers, researchers, professionals and others, especially those who were involved in commerce and manufacturing, English became 'Indian' in practice. The Dubhashi (Interpreters) became indispensable as a class in itself during the East India Company rule and for more than a hundred years from 1757 to 1857, and for another 90 years - from 1957 to 1947 - English became the most important language in India under the British Empire. After 1947, English became one of the Indian Languages with all its new features. Thus English has played a key role in the intellectual history of India for about 250 years and it will continue to play an important role in the cultural and literary domains of India.

Modern Indian literature is inconceivable without a serious engagement of the creative writers with English and other European or Western world literature in many different ways. In the interaction between Indian writers who wrote in their own languages, even without knowing English or other European languages and literatures, the interaction was indirect, subtle or even invisible. Some of the outstanding writers who wrote in Indian languages such as Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi, Gujarati, Odiya, Assamese and Punjabi were familiar with English and other European languages such as French, German, Russian, Spanish and even Greek and Latin. But they chose to write in their mother tongues. Others, who wrote in their mother tongues without knowing English, too came under the definite sway of modern literary movements indirectly.

European Modernism reached Indian writers mainly though English Literature and translations of other literatures in English. The idea of a world literature was first articulated by Goethe in the early 19th Century. The changes brought out by Napoleonic wars in Europe were part of the process. When ideas spread, they did not do so in merely any narrow domain, but in a global, comprehensive way. Politics, philosophy, art, literature, language, culture and science all become focal points in this process.

Georg Lukacs' *Studies in European Realism* is very useful to understand the importance and centrality of realism as a literary as well as aesthetic movement in the West since Renaissance. Realism was a by product of the social changes that opposed feudalism. In other words, realism and the emergence of a modern democratic, bourgeois world vision and capitalist mode of commodity production go hand in hand or as a parallel to each other. Parliamentary democracy, universal franchise, nationalism, colonialism, anti-colonial struggles etc, strongly influenced the realism of the western world, particularly western Europe, North American, Australia, Russia. The Asian and African countries got inspiration from these

countries largely through English education. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries were the centuries of realism and modernism respectively. Modernism was a radical response to the traditional concepts of the forms, styles and techniques of the realist tradition in one sense, and a sharp negation of the traditional world view that provided a coherent, transparent and predictable account of social reality and the place of an individual within the social world. Here again, Lukacs' views on modernism and ideology is helpful for a deeper understanding of the two major aspects of modernism: Modernism as a technique and modernism as a world view. Within modernism, there were and *are* many strands of which a number of them faded away after a brief feverish spell.

It is out of the scope of this Unit to give you a detailed account of literary movements such as classicism, neo-classicism, romanticism, naturalism, realism etc that held sway in the different historical periods in Europe. It is also difficult to use the limited space given for this unit to trace the moorings of each literary, artistic and cultural spurt under each category in every country, even within Europe as the canvas is simply too vast. Therefore, we will limit our discussion here to identifying a few outstanding works of literature under each category that has more than European/Western appeal. The term 'Universal', in a way, breaks the barriers of geography, language and cultural nuances through the sheer force of the poetic, narrative content of the work of literature.

4.2.1 Classicism

Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, the Greek plays of Aeschylus and Aristophanes, the Indian plays of Kalidasa, the Sangam Tamil literature and all the medieval epics written in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Bengali, Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati and other Indian languages with at least one thousand years of literary tradition are typical *classical* works. They follow the traditions of set literary forms, themes, techniques and rules of classicism as defined by the authorities in the respective languages.

The translations, trans-creations and various versions of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are good examples of classical literature as well as comparative literature in India. The multilingual situation in India has enabled numerous classical authors to chart their own courses in rendering the familiar stories, legends and epics in their respective times and cultures.

4.2.2 Neo-classicism

Classicism gave way to neoclassicism in the eighteenth century when society was silently changing from the old feudal order to the early industrial order. Language, artistic and literary conventions were still part of the established traditions and norms, though the content and presentation acquired a new form. No longer was it possible to write epics and other forms of literary devices to deal with exalted themes, events and characters, because the heroic period was long gone and even forgotten. Only mock heroic themes and epics like Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* and John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* were possible in the post–Elizabethan period. Even the great plays of Shakespeare had not completely stuck to the chronicles, dates and events of the past that the author chose to portray with contemporary features and ideas. Now, the known historical events and characters became quite contemporary in so far as they talked about the issues, problems, feelings, emotions and dilemmas they were faced with as seen by the writers living in an age of transition. They acquired a degree of universality by focusing on universal themes like love, war, betrayal, fidelity, friendship, deception, honesty,

hope and despair but they also reflected the reality of their age: the spirit of renaissance and humanism typical of that age. Neo-classicism reflected its own contemporary reality of general stagnation, abundant leisure for the declining aristocracy without any social activity, the rising middle class that was completely immersed in commercial and day to day routine of the modern industrial, democratic society (though nascent), and the trivialization of every theme, issue and character that could be worthy of heroic, classical status. This phase of literary and cultural boredom, or 'uneventfulness', was effectively broken for the first time by Romanticism.

Activity 1

Can you think of a parallel development in Indian literature? Write about the important features of that movement in your own language in about 100 words.

4.2.3 Romanticism

Romanticism in Britain was ushered in when William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge published their *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798. In his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth has stated the purpose of his and presumably other Romantic poets thus:

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of language really used by men, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature: chiefly, as far as regards the manner in which we associate ideas in a state of excitement. Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater simplicity, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of rural occupations, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, from their rank in society and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. Accordingly, such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets, who think that they are conferring honour upon themselves and their art, in proportion as they separate themselves from the sympathies of men, and indulge in arbitrary and capricious habits of expression, in order to furnish food for fickle tastes, and fickle appetites, of their own creation.

The monumental work created by Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey was carried forward by the much more radical, tempestuous and all-embracing trio of contemporary Romantic poets in Britain - Byron, Keats and Shelley. Together, the

three formed a powerful Romantic cluster, though each contributed independently. The amazing creative burst of energy and output of each is a phenomenon in the history of literary productivity (Keats died at the age of 25; Shelley at 30; and Byron at 36). The enormous corpus of romantic poetry from these three together with that of Wordsworth and Coleridge set a formidable bench mark which has not been equalled let alone surpassed by any other strand of Romanticism in Europe.

French Romanticism produced Alexandre Dumaspère (writer), Charles-Valentin Alkan (composer), Honoré de Balzac (novelist), Hector Berlioz (composer), Georges Bizet (composer), François-René de Chateaubriand (writer), Eugène Delacroix (painter), Théophile Gautier (poet), Théodore Géricault (painter). German Romanticism gave us many important figures in art, literature, music and other fields. Figures such as Caspar David Friedrich (painter), Johannes Brahms (composer), Joseph Görres (writer), Jakob Grimm (linguist), Wilhelm Grimm (linguist), Philipp Otto Runge (painter), Adam Müller (literary critic and political theorist), Novalis (poet, novelist), Joseph von Eichendorff (poet), Friedrich Schlegel (poet, theorist), August Wilhelm Schlegel (poet, translator, theorist), Franz Schubert (composer), Robert Schumann (composer, polemicist), Ludwig Tieck (novelist, translator), Ludwig Uhland (poet, dramatist), E.T.A. Hoffmann (writer, composer),Adolf von Hansel (composer), Zacharias Werner (poet, dramatist), are worth mentioning.

Russian Romanticism‘s iconic figure was Alexander Pushkin. Others like Mikhail Glinka, Mikhail Lermontov, Mily Balakirev, Alexander Borodin, Modest MussorgskyNikolai Rimsky-Korsakov PyotrIlyich Tchaikovsky are among the prominent figures in the fields of literature, painting and music.

4.2.4 Realism

Realism is the legitimate successor of Romanticism. It is also perhaps the best artistic and literary expression of the industrial-capitalist-bourgeois-democratic society which is usually called the ‘modern’ society or age. By the end of the 18th century, practically all the anti-feudal, bourgeois democratic revolutions in different forms were over in Europe, although democratic revolutions in Germany and a few other European countries such as Belgium and Italy attained their final phase only in 1848. However, realism had already established itself as the most prominent literary and artistic expression of 19th century Europe including Germany. The novel, the periodical Magazines and circulation libraries, plays, poems, essays and other forms of creative writings as well as paintings, sculpture, music, dance etc characterized realism as the most authentic and effective expression of the nineteenth century western world. Though the United states of America did not have an anti-feudal revolution, its war of Independence in 1776 and the civil war of 1864 played the same role as other revolutions in Europe in shaping the national identity and democratic industrial society in that part of North-America.

Some of the best works of realism came from Goethe (Germany); Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Jane Austen, the Bronte Sisters (England); Balzac (France); Turgenev, Gogol, Lermontov, Herzen, Chekhov, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and others (Russia). Many works of realism came from fiction, short stories, plays (drama), poetry, essays, autobiographies and other literary forms. The list would be too long to be even mentioned within the scope of this Unit. You may have to spend considerable time to get a fairly good idea of Realism in Art and Literature of every major European country and the Americas, if you wish to have a fairly comprehensive understanding of realism and its range.

Translations and comparative studies of various national literatures, including Non-European literatures, became major features of this period – the 18th& 19th centuries. The trend of realism continued as the dominant one for two centuries and even beyond. At the beginning of the 20th century, the major challenge to realism came in the form of modernism with its myriad forms, streams and strands. We shall touch upon some of them in the following section and then move on to consider its variations or its impact on Indian writers – both who wrote in English and in their mother tongues (Indian Languages).

Activity 2

Write about the modern works of literature in your own language that were inspired by the Western writers of the 19th and 20th Centuries (100 words).

4.3 MODERNISM OF THE WEST

Modernism has remained as the most influential aesthetic trend of the twentieth century western world which also impacted the other parts of the world. In spite of the claims about ' post-modernism'trends, modernism along with realism still reigns supreme as a literary and aesthetic trend even today in the 21st century.Essentially, it is the continuation of the basic agenda set by both trends that characterizes 21st century art and literature. While ' post' modernism is an extension of modernism in terms of techniques and presentation styles, the theoretical concerns of post-modernism is an extension of humanism that clearly characterized realism. Harking back to the individual human beings as the foci of artistic and literary activities only confirms the original concerns of humanism as opposed to religion and other ideological manifestations of feudalism. Renaissance and the subsequent developments in art and literature were guided by humanist philosophical principles that upheld the central place of human individuals. God was at the centre during the feudal age and it was decentered by Man (and Woman) during the industrial, capitalist, bourgeois, democratic phase that still continues. Realism and modernism chose the *individual* as the subject or theme. What, then, distinguished modernism from realism? The distinction, indeed, is in terms of technique, style and the world view or ideology.

4.3.1 Modernism: Some Definitions

There is no one single definition of modernism that encapsulates comprehensively enough the various aspects of Modernism. Therefore it is necessary to look at the phenomenon of modernism from many different angles within the contexts of different countries. Here we shall look at some of the representative definitions of modernism though the definitions themselves may not be in complete agreement on the aspects each one may focus on.

Stephen Spender made a clear distinction between the "moderns" and the "contemporaries" as follows:

"Modern art is that in which the artist reflects awareness of an unprecedented modern situation in its form and idiom. The quality which is called modern shows in the realized sensibility of style and form than in the subject matter".(Stephen Spender 1963 P 71)

For Spender, the unprecedented 'modern' situation is not related to the 'subject matter' but to the 'form'. 'idiom', sensibility', style etc of an 'awareness' of the situation which was unprecedented. It was the situation where the individual's subjective world became the only or the main canvas on which the modernist artist

/writer expresses his/her world view or outlook in a new form, idiom and style. Disenchantment with the outside world, a spontaneous hostility and anger towards the external world, loneliness, boredom, personal tragedies, distrust of the masses and mass actions, a sense of stagnation, of immobility, helplessness, despair etc characterized the bourgeois modernist writers and artists when they chose to move away from the conventions of realism that held the mirror up to nature to reflect a transparent, faithful reality of the common world and the world of the individual.

The modernist was dissatisfied with a straightforward depiction of the world in the manner of the realists or even the romantics. Writers like Y.B.Yeats, T.S.Eliot, Lionel Trilling, Franz Kafka and others talked about the futility, hopelessness and helplessness of the modern world that did not promise anything to the individual. A sense of apocalypse and despair became common to modernists. It is this sense of purposelessness that persuaded T.S.Eliot to characterize modern history as an "immense panorama of futility and anarchy" while reviewing James Joyce's *Ulysses.* The historical situation that prevailed just before and immediately after the First World War presented such a picture to the modernists who essentially shared the same world view: the world view that saw the continuity of the past and the present and logically the future because of the eternal changelessness of the human condition. Such an ahistoric world view guided the modernists to portray their 'modern' condition as some thing that had to be shown through a new idiom, form and style, because the subject matter is the same for all modernists. This is the ideological domain where many battles have been fought on the utility, desirability or otherwise of modernist techniques. The outcome of the battles mainly fought among Marxist critics of modernism led to the recognition of two types of modernism: Modernism with a bourgeois outlook or worldview and modernism from the Left. Though modernists of both kinds share their fascination for experimentation, innovation, new forms, idioms, styles and techniques – particularly the *montage* technique - they fundamentally differ in using the modernist forms and techniques for entirely different purposes.

Writers like Vladimir Mayakovski, Bertolt Brecht and many outstanding writers and artists from the left, using their art and literature to create a new world, had disapproved of conventional realism and they stoutly defended modernism on that count. However, they did not share the world view of the modernists of the bourgeois variety. W.B.Yeats, T.S. Eliot, E.M.Forster, Virginia Woolf, Stephen Spender, Lionel Trilling of England or the French Surrealists, the Russian Symbolists and German Expressionists were all *modernists*but their world views differed. The famous debates on Modernism, Realism, Socialist Realism of the 1930, 40s and 50s among the Marxist Critics such as Georg Lukacs, Bertolt Brecht, Ernst Block, Walter Benjamin,the British Marxist critics Christopher Caudwell, Ralf Fox, Aleck West, Raymond Williams etc, the Soviet Marxist critics, the French Marxists, the American and the Canadian Marxist critics have contributed significantly to this debate. Modernism cannot be seen as having chronologically ended in1950s, though by then the euphoria was on the wane. Post modernism is, in fact, a continuity of modernism, an extension or a reaction to modernism without breaking its ideological shell. When we look at the post modernist concerns such as preoccupation with the subjective world of the individual, skepticism, questioning of all existing value systems, generalization, truths about groups, cultures traditions, races, conventions etc,it is clear that post-modernist pre-occupations and the bourgeois modernist pre-occupations are the same. The perception that they are two completely different trends is not supported by any evidence. But we need not go into details here. A brief account of modernism in its different forms in the major European countries would give us a better understanding of the issues at hand.

4.3.2 Modernism in England

The pre-first world war situation in England presented a picture of what Charles Dickens expressed so effectively in the opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities*: "It was the best of times; It was the worst of times…" It was at that time that Victorian England reached its zenith and the decline of the mightiest empire started. After the First World War, the social changes affected writers and artists much more profoundly than men of politics and religion. The pre-war complacency in social life, moral hypocrisy, and philistinism in art and culture were shaken to their roots by writers like Virginia Woolf, D.H.Lawrence, T.S.Eliot, W.B.Yeats, James Joyce, E.M.Forster and others who were completely disillusioned with modern reality and the incapability of conventional literary devices to capture the new reality. Therefore, they had to resort to new styles, techniques and devices, and, in fact, new ways of looking at the world in order to make meaning out of a meaningless world and convey it through their writing. Charles Loch Mowat very aptly describes the responses of the modernist writers in England to the changed world as follows:

" A changing spirit was most apparent among writers… Here the gap between the generations which the war had caused was most obvious. It was as wide as the gap in political life, but it was the inversion of it: in politics the older generation remained in the saddle, in literature the younger generation, those who had fought in the war and those too young to have done so, quickly thrust its elders into the background". (Quoted byP.R.Ramanujam, 1993, p 5)

The world presented by the English modernist writers was of pessimism, hopelessness and anxiety, if not outright despair. Eliot, Lawrence, Woolf, Yeats, Joyce and others produced monumental works of literature. But the world that emerges from their writings is one of sorrow, failure and despair. We notice a common a trait in their writings - not withstanding their artistic variations –which is: a singular apathy towards social action and disbelief in any collective action to change the existing external, material world. This apathy towards collective social action is typical of the writers and artists who were disillusioned with their external world without an alternative to think about the possibility of changing it. This is the crux of the ideology of bourgeois modernists that invited the relentless criticism of Marxist critics like Georg Lukacs. However, there were modernists from the left like Mayakovski, Brecht and many others who shared a progressive ideology of changing the existing system and the reality of the material world through collective social action of the masses, the common people. In their art and literature, every modernist device became a new and effective tool to change society through their creative activities.

4.3.3 Modernism in France

The French revolution of 1789 gave France the status of 'Mother of all revolutions', including intellectual, artistic and literary forms of rebellion. The Enlightenment movement continued in many different countries from the 18th century to the end of the 19th. Modernism in France maintained its continuity with the enlightenment tradition of aligning with social action for change. Dadaism and Surrealism are the best examples of modernism in France.

The Dadaists and Surrealists were also, like modernists in other major European countries, dissatisfied with their world. But they wanted to deploy their art and literature in the service of social change. What kind of action they resorted to and the kind of change they wanted to see are the major controversies in French Modernism. Tristan Tzara, the leader of Dadaists declared:"We are a furious wind,

tearing the dirty linen of clouds and prayers, preparing the great spectacle of disaster, fire, decomposition".(P.R.Ramanujam,1993,p.6). The action proposed was elitist and anarchist, as the Dadaists did not create their new literature for the masses.

Surrealists, on the contrary, pledged a strong alliance between their artistic inspiration and social action. Human expression in all forms was the broad goal of the surrealists and they aimed at freeing literature from the contemplative, dreamy world of the symbolists, for example.

Symbolism was an important component of French modernism. It was an expression of the artists' hostility towards the stagnation, ordinariness, boredom and uninteresting day to day reality of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century French society. Baudelaire, Verlaine, Mallarme, Rimbaud were the Major French symbolists who celebrated 'the cult of words, the music of poetry and the world of dreams (Picasso: Spain)

German Expressionism: Expressionism was the most important component of German modernism. Spontaneity, aggressiveness and revolt against the past were the prominent features of expressionism. It came as a response to the later nineteenth century German social drabness and the complacency of the public. Naturalism and impressionism were the other variations of German modernism. Though all had the common dissatisfaction of the external, social world, they differed profoundly in their philosophical orientation or inclinations. While the impressionists tried to escape into a dreamy, glorious and colourful world of their subjectivity and imagination that rejected the economic boom of the middle class rolling on its material wealth, the expressionists rejected the same through freedom, passion, power and energy. Weekend, a prominent German modernist, hated the conventional bourgeois' attitudes but sympathized with bohemians and 'robust scoundrels' who were not ashamed of their natural instincts. George Kaiser celebrated the power of destruction though his play *Gas*. It included the self-destruction of the German people too. Alfred Rosenberg also glorified the mood of decay and destruction. One of the important, if not unique, features of German modernism was the artists' quest to blend polarities such as good and evil, body and soul, Dionysius and Apollo – themes that dominated the philosophical writings of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer. These trends were clear departures and directly opposed to the traditions of Goethe, Kant, Hegel and Marx who upheld the primacy of reason before everything else, irrespective of their modes of thinking and expression. German modernism, particularly expressionism, anticipated the triumph of fascism and Nazism. Hitler in Germany and Mussolini in Italy were the peaks of that triumph.

Italian modernism was essentially the same as that of other variations in Europe. It was an artistic and literary response to the economic, literary, cultural and democraticbackwardness in Italy at the turn of the twentieth century. After the First World War, the political scene in Italy changed completely Mussolini captured power though manipulative tactics. In the cultural domain, Benedict Croce's idealistic aesthetics had a considerable role in promoting tendencies of irrationalism in art and literature which objectively served Mussolini's fascism. FilippoTommaso Marinetti, the leader of Malian Futurism published his Futurist Manifesto in 1909 and declared that the futurists wanted to free Italy from" the stinking gangrene of its professors, archaeologist, tourist guides and antique dealers". Like the expressionists of Germany, the futurists of Italy too, exalted war, violence and destruction. The Manifesto said:

" Literature having up to now magnified thoughtful immobility, ecstasy, and sleep, we want to exalt the aggressive gesture, the feverish insomnia, the athletic step, the

perilous leap, the box on the ear, and the fisticuff… We want to glorify war - the only hygiene of the world - militarism, patriotism, the anarchist's destructive gestures, the fine ideas that kill, and the scorn of woman". (P.R.Ramanujam, 1993, pp.10,11)

No wonder Hitler and Mussolini became the closest allies, embodying all the irrational and anti-historical tendencies of the time. Italian modernism avidly served the ideology of fascism.

Russia: Russian modernism took under its wings, a wide range of streams: futurist symbolism, religious symbolism, mysticism and various sub-streams within each stream. However, they could be classified broadly into two categories: those who represented the conservative trend of modernism that professed contemplation to action, word beauty to subject matter, and decadence to regeneration; and those who represented the radical, left-wing ideas in their literary writings heralding a new world. The religious symbolists like Merzhovsky and Zinaida Gippius represented the conservative trend, while Alexander Block, a symbolist, sided with people and social action. The Futurists, formalists, constructivists and cubists in Russia supported in general left-wing politics and social change. The Futurists Khelnikov and Mayakovski decried all varieties of conservative modernist trends and went to the urban masses, met in cafes, held meetings and exhorted the artists and the writers to take up the cause of the people as their own artistic and literary cause. The futurist pamphlet 'A slap in the face to public taste' was published in 1914 and outlined the artistic, literary and political agenda of Russian futurism. Mayakovski was the finest poet of this trend of modernism and also of the Bolshevik revolution.

Activity 3

Write about the rebellious and revolutionary writings of the first half of the 20th Century in your own words.(100-120 words).

4.4 IMPACT OF WESTERN LITERARY MOVEMENTS ON INDIAN LITERATURES

The Indian Renaissance started with a political movement against British colonial rule as well as the social reform movements against the outmoded thinking, beliefs and customs of India itself . The freedom struggle in its different phases produced writers and artists who were profoundly inspired and influenced by western democracy, romanticism, realism and modernism. The ideas of liberty, equality and fraternity that culminated in the French Revolution spread like wild fire throughout Europe in the nineteenth century. They were also carried to many colonies including India a little later. The introduction of English education actually followed the early efforts of modern Indian thinkers like Ram Mohan Roy in Bengal, Jyotiba Phule in Maharashtra (then Bombay Presidency) and Subramania Bharati and others in the Madras Presidency. English education and modern education opened the windows of the outside world to Indian scholars and writers who had long ceased to be universal or international from the days of Nalanda, Takhshila etc of ancient India. The idea of democracy, modern sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences etc opened new vistas of learning, scholarship and exploration by Indians. Similar changes occurred in the field of art and literature also when the Indian writers came into contact with the western literary works in English or their translations in various Indian Languages. Comparative literature should go beyond the simple literary devices like form, style and technique and see the new content, new concepts, ideas, themes, new outlook etc of the modern Indian writers when it looks at the impact of literary movements of the west in countries like India.

Unlike the classical literatures in India that developed independently of western classicism and neo-classicism, modern literary trends and movements in India were profoundly inspired and influenced by the romantic, realistic and the modernist movements of the west, particularly Western Europe. In the three presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras, the spread of English and modern education provided the necessary exposure to the Indian intelligentsia to know more about the various new developments in the fields of art, literature, science, politics and the rest of the modern academic disciplines. India's freedom struggle was decisively shaped by the English educated intellectuals, although the masses led by them knew little or no English. The resurgence in Indian languages had an ambivalent relationship with English. While patriotic zeal prompted the writers to protest the domination of English, their attraction towards modern ideas and concepts of democracy, equality, freedom, women's freedom, justice etc compelled them to read more and more books in and through the English language. The great Tamil poet Subramania Bharati, who called himself a 'Disciple of Shelley' (Shelley Dasan), was deeply influenced by the British Romantic poets. He was equally fascinated by the various democratic revolutions in Europe and elsewhere. He was one of the first major poets in India to welcome the socialist revolution in Russia and the ideas of socialism, equality and justice.

In all the major Indian languages such as Bengali, Hindi, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Odia, Urdu, Punjabi and others, we can see influences of a similar kind shaping modern Indian literature. Novel, short story, plays and new verse were certainly new forms adopted or adapted by Indian writers who wrote in various Indian languages. Those who wrote in English had a more direct relation with western literary trends and conventions. Modern Indian literatures are characterized by a number of features which hardly have any resemblance to the 'modernist' trends of the west. Anti-colonialism, national liberation, anti-feudalism, social reformism, Gandhi's ideas of non-violence, freedom, development, social use of technology, equality of women and equality of castes are the distinct features of 'modern' literatures in India.

The literary traditions of Tamil and Sanskrit do recognize the need for introducing new features with the changing times. But the search for modernity in the present sense started in India with the struggle against colonialism. Printing facilitated the exposure to western art, literature and intellectual movements. Sisir Kumar Das aptly cautions in this regard: "It is necessary to state emphatically that western approaches to modernity either as a category of periodization or as a particular social experience, whether as a project or as an attitude towards past cannot be mechanically applied to Indian situation at all "(396).

Modernity in Indian literatures was part of the westernization. Therefore, any deviation from the classical Indian literary traditions assumed the form of 'modernity' in a broader sense. Though fiction (novel, short story, etc), plays, essays, New Verse, biographies, literary criticism, polemical writings of any sort, satire etc became 'modern' as compared to what had been written in the past specially in view of the fact that classical poetry of the past was governed by strict norms and rules of prosody and grammar. In fact, the classical conventions, idioms and expressions were viewed as 'anti-modern'. At the thematic level, new subjects dominated the thinking and preoccupations of the Indian modern writers. Although they freely adapted literary devices of English and other literatures, they did not necessarily follow western modernism mechanically. National liberation, patriotism, revolt against feudal culture, attempts to change the existing social structure, questioning the norms of sex and morality, decrying the inequalities on the basis of gender,

caste, religion and class - these became the subject matter of modern Indian literatures of Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Bengali, Hindi, Odiya, Marathi, Urdu and other major Indian languages of the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century.

Activity 4

Can you relate the various strands of Modern Literature in Indian Languages to the various modernist trends of the West? Would it be correct to state that Modern Indian Literature has nothing to do with the West.? Why? (100 words)

4.5 LET US SUM UP

We have discussed in this unit some of the most important literary movements such as classicism, neo-classicism, romanticism, realism and modernism. We have considered them in their context from a comparative and historical perspective. We have analyzed the various aspects of these movements focusing on the themes, language, style, form, world views of the writers and other social issues that directly impacted their writings. We specifically looked at the impact of Western literary movements on Indian writers during and after British colonialism. We have argued that all " modern poetry identified as modern are invariably products of Western inspiration, imitation or appropriation " as S.K.Das puts it.

Hindi, Urdu, Maithli, Kashmiri, Dogri, Rajasthani, Sindhi, Manipuri, Punjabi, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Odiya literatures have been profoundly impacted by Western Modernism, Realism and Romanticism. Modern Indian Poetry, Short Story, Novel, Travelogues, Autobiographies, Essays etc. written in Indian languages have all been inspired by Western Literary Movements. Indian writing in English is a direct offspring of the Western literary and aesthetic movements. Comparative Literature would benefit by having a more productive and authentic assessment of the different genres of modern Indian Literature, if the Western influences on them are specifically studied.

4.6 UNIT END QUESTIONS

1) Write a note on the impact of English Education in India. (500-600 words)

2) Who can be called the first Modernist writer in your language? Why? (800 words)

3) Compare and contrast any one of the classical works in any Indian language with another western classic. (500-600 words)

4) What was the Indian response to romanticism in English literature? (600 words)

5) Choose any two Indian novels of realism pertaining to the first half of the 20th century in India and explain why they are considered realistic. (800 words)

6) Write a brief essay on the various strands of modernism of the West at the turn of the 20th century.

7) Outline the impact of western modernism on the literary works in your own language. (600 to 800 words)

4.7 REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

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