



Tracing The Threads Of The Rise Of Comparative Literature As A Discipline

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Abstract: The comparative literature is a study of analysing relation between literature and other areas of knowledge and beliefs or to a subject related mainly to social sciences, humanities or arts. Comparison is an essential concept in our life and no human lives in vacuum. Human experiences, perceptions and observations about their surrounding are constantly influenced or get shaped by others. This shows that how people and events are working in a close network. This interconnectedness can show a pattern of regularity based on social norms or rules. This is comparable in terms of similarity. When similarities can be clubbed together, dissimilarities are easy to pick. This present paper is intended to analyse the discipline of comparative literature with an aim to explore the journey of comparative literature to establish it as a separate discipline in modern thought.

Index Terms - Comparative, literature, studies, interrelationship, methodology.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, modern human has crossed the political, ethnic, cultural and linguistic boundaries which made them to understand the vastness of the realm of literature and by comparing two literary /art works; they are able to understand the meaning of similarities and differences between literatures. Creative thinking and bright instincts have always been the cornerstone of innovations and human development in all forms. Creative thinking is responsible for producing the greatest advances in human thoughts while reaming the driving force in literature. The writer does this creative work by embodying social concerns, changing paradigms and his multifaceted life experiences. To prove the authenticity, literariness and excellence of a literary work, its qualities are tested by comparing it with other literary works.

II. DEFINITION

Comparative studies are constantly evolving. Although, it is creating a dialogue with a multi-faceted and multilateral new thinking-consciousness, yet considering all the multi-dimensional aspects of comparative literature is a head spinning task for any comparatist especially dealing with multilingual and multi cultural societies. In his book *Comparative Literature Theory, Method, Application*, Steven Totosy de Zepetnek writes:

In principle, the discipline of Comparative Literature is in to a method in the study of literature in at least two ways. First, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature, and/or it means the knowledge and application of other disciplines in and for the study of literature and second, Comparative Literature has an ideology of inclusion of the Other, be that a marginal literature in its several meanings of marginality, a genre, various text types, etc (58).

As per The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Oxford Dictionary, the word Comparative means, "measured or judged by how similar or different it is to something else; relative", "involving the systematic observation of the similarities or dissimilarities between two or more branches of science or subjects of study"(244,306).

These definitions clearly show that comparative is estimation or a systematic observation to measure similarities and dissimilarities between two or more objects. In another words comparison is the process of examining or weighing the similarities and differences between two or more objects. It is concerned with knowing and understanding things and seeing their similarities and dissimilarities. The word comparative is used in late Middle English period (1150-1500). The word 'comparative' derives its existence from Latin comparativus, from comparare which means 'to pair or match. The word 'study' means to examine.

As per The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the word study means, "the act of considering or examining something in detail" (1524). So comparative study means to explore or examine the similarities and differences of two or more objects/works/situations/literature based on comparison.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Every literary writer urges to write a unique literary piece and to give that work the status of a masterpiece. The desire to enlist literary work as a masterpiece and unique, the theconcept of 'comparative literature' has come into existence. Comparative literature accepts as its basic objective the systematic study of the interrelationships of different literatures. By understanding the inter-relationships of any two or more works, its similarities and differences are identified. Comparative literature can be of great help in alleviating the lust for growth in the field of knowledge and encouraging deeper study. Comparative Literature or more accurately Comparative Literature studies is relatively the new area of literary studies. The purpose of this term 'Comparative literature' is not to identify or classify any particular literature but refer to a method of studying

literature. Applying this term comparative literature actually means comparative studies in literature or comparative literature studies.

IV. EVOLUTION OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES

In the field of literary thought comparative study goes at least as far back as literary criticism. Aristotle, in his Poetics, attempts to evaluate the relationship between poetry, philosophy, history, painting and various genres of literature such as tragedy, epic and poetry. He used comparative approach to study literature. Francis Mairs in 1598 used this word comparative for first time in his essay "A Comparative Discourse of our English Poets with the Greek, Latin and Italian Poets". Later In 1602, William Fulbecke wrote "A Comparative Discourse of Laws". In 1775, a book named A Comparative Anatomy of Brute Animals was published. In 1800, Charles Dibdin wrote A Complete History of the English Stage in five parts in which he did a comparison among various theatres of the world such as Italian, Portuguese, German, Francis etc. Although the word comparative was used before, but in English, it was Matthew Arnold who pointed out the requirement of comparative literature, and used this term in a letter to his sister. He mentioned; "How plain it is now, though an attention to the comparative literatures for the last fifty years might have instructed any one of it, that England is in a certain sense far behind the continent" (112).

To add more to the contribution of Matthew Arnold in his lecture at Oxford in 1857 talked about the need of studying comparative literature. He said:

The spectacles, the facts, presented for the comprehension of the present age, are immense. The facts consist of the events, the institutions, the sciences, the arts, the literatures, in which human life has manifested itself up to the present time; the spectacle is the collective life of humanity. And everywhere there is connection, everywhere there is illustration; no single events, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to the other events, to other literatures. The literature of ancient Greece, the literature of the Christian Middle Age, So long as they are regarded as isolated literatures, two isolated growths of the human spirit, are not adequately comprehended, and it is adequate comprehension which is demanded of the present age (124).

While it is indeed Mathew Arnold who mentioned clearly about the significance of comparative studies in literature, the earliest examples of comparative literature studies can be found in the writings of German and French mythologists and ancient literary historians. Even the influence of Greek literature on Latin, which was highlighted by ancient Romans, was also categorized as the study of comparative literature. Literature cannot be limited in the physical or political boundaries of its region. Literature interacts across the boundaries of geographical, culture, religion, political and art etc.

Although Matthew Arnold used the phrase "comparative literature" in a letter but Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett, an Irish-New Zealand lawyer and scholar was a pioneer in the field of comparative literature and he was the first scholar who introduced comparative literature in English-speaking world. He also examined students in economics at the University of Auckland and held the Chair of Classics and English Literature from 1885 until 1890. His most remarkable work Comparative Literature in 1886 was probably the first book on

this subject which outstands him as the first scholar to wrote a book about methods and principles of Comparative Literature. Many scholars consider it as the fundamental work for studying comparative literature. It is worth mentioning here that Posnett interpreted comparative literature as ‘the general theory of literary evolution, the idea that literature passes through stages of inception, culmination and decline” (45). Later scholars did not agree with Posnett and considered it inappropriate to call Comparative Literature merely as a “general theory of literary evolution” as comparative literature is not a general history of literature or world literature; it is infact a study of literary works in dialogue at a specific historical moment and location.

In 1871, first course of comparative literature studies was offered at Cornell University by the Reverend Charles Chauncey Shack lord. The department of comparative literature came into existence in 1899 at Columbia University and took firm ground as discipline in the United States by the post war years.

In the nineteenth century, comparative literature began to derive its meaning from those artistic works, which were previously received orally and now began to be published. During seventies and eighties, when literary theory was establishing itself, comparative literature departments became centers of theoretical works and contributed in the development of literary theory. By late 19th century, Comparative Literature Studies received academic status in American and European universities.

However The French School was the pioneer to establish various theories of Comparative literature. The origin of this new field of study was quite visible in some French writings of the early nineteenth century. Observing the contributions of theorist Jean-Jacques Ampère and Abel Francois Villemain for establishing the form of literary studies, Ultrich Weissterin in *Comparative Literature and Literary Theory* stated that they are “the true father(s) of systematically conceived comparative literature in France—or anywhere, for the matter”(34).

Based upon the statement of French Philarète Chasles who defines it as the study of the influence of thought upon thought (45), the influence became the centre of French traditional Comparative studies which was later cleared by Ferdinand Brunetière who stated “we are defined only by comparing ourselves to others; and we do not know ourselves when we know only ourselves” (181). Like French School, German scholars were equally under the impact of the significance of influence. But they stressed upon social evolution and like Russian School, they believed in the notions of the German philosophers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.

The American concept of Comparative Literature includes the survey on the relationship between the literature and other fields. The American concept indicates that the method must be specified. Under the dawn of new criticism, Rene Wellek’s fierce opposition of French school geared a change from a historical approach into a critical approach in comparative literature.

Nineteenth century comparative literature has an international context in its theory and research. It also asserts the superiority and timeless quality of literature. In the early period, the thinkers of comparative literature faced both glorification and irony with great determination. In the field of modern thought, comparative study has been accepted as a methodical and objective discipline to solve the problems of the literary field with logical and scientific thinking.

The concept of postmodernism emerged in the later half of the twentieth century. Jean Francois Lyotard, the leading scholar of post-modernism and his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, published in French language in 1979 and in English language in 1984, is a reflection of the literary world, with which the impact of postmodernism on literature was inevitable. Postmodernism has given a new twist to comparative literature. The thought of Derrida, Lyotard, Frampton and Pierre Bordieu has made the process of redefining the relationship between literature and national literature by giving a new direction to the traditional thought towards comparative literature. Post-modernism rejects the traditional broad communitarian monotheism by emphasizing the importance of differences.

V. CONCLUSION

After considering the above details, it can be concluded that the relationship of comparative literature depends on the inter-relationship of different literatures. It is such a modern science that various literatures has influences upon one another, and efforts are being made to solve problems related to impacts by imparting knowledge of impacts. Comparative studies are interrelated with literature as well as other academic disciplines. A comparative study is a quantitative study of literature. A comparative study is committed to historical relativity, poetic norms, and the evolution of art. It fulfills the duty of bringing the best literary features to the fore. Comparative literature brings together not the same work but several works at a time and establishes conclusions after considering their similarities and dissimilarities. Various thinkers have played a significant role in establishing comparative literature as a distinct discipline in accordance with changing paradigms. Comparative literature provides a new direction to traditional thought.

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