

CHAPTER-III

**NATIONAL, COMPARATIVE, GENERAL
AND
WORLD LITERATURE**

Introduction :

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country and the study of the relationship between literature and other areas of knowledge and belief such as sociology, philosophy and psychology and other arts like music, painting, sculpture and architecture. It is the comparison of one literature with another or others and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human experience. But several areas and terms are contiguous or seen to overlap with Comparative Literature. Classification is essential to distinguish Comparative Literature from National Literature, General Literature and World Literature.

National Literature.

National Literature is a politico-historical term. Politics and history change according to the exigencies of the time and in such a process literature gets narrowed down. National Literature has two contradictory explanations. One is popular

and the other sense is accepted by scholars. The popular one says that National Literature is produced by the people of a State, in the language of the people. For example, the Tamil literature, written in Tamil and by a Tamilian alone is accepted as National Literature. This is a very narrow sense, which excludes Tamil literature produced in countries like Sri Lanka, Malaysia and other countries. Many comparatists accept all writings produced by those people who share the same culture and language though they hail from different nations.

Difference Between National and Comparative Literature.

There is no fundamental difference between methods of research in national literature and comparative literature – (eg) a comparison between Bharathi and Bharathidasan or Bharathi and Whitman. Some subjects are encountered in Comparative Literature, which goes beyond National Literature — the contact between different cultures and the problems connected with translation in particular. Even while geographically speaking, an air-tight distinction between National Literature and Comparative Literature is difficult. Sometimes, there are authors writing in the same language but belong to different nations. Also, there is a difference between the British citizenship of T.S. Eliot and the American citizenship of Thomas Mann. Sometimes there are writers in one country who write in various languages or one writer writing in many languages.

World Literature

The term 'World Literature' is closely associated with the term Comparative Literature. The magic term was coined by J.W.V. Goethe, the German scholar, while in conversation with

his friend and secretary, Eckermann. Goethe criticised the narrow provincialism exhibited by the German writers of his time. He advocated the cause of World Literature. According to Goethe, response to literature inspiring valid criticism not only becomes an international experience, not at all bound by narrow boundaries of countries. The study of World Literature is a prerequisite for the study of Comparative Literature, mainly because the former provides the researcher with necessary raw materials and information necessary for organized work of comparative criticism.

Comparative Literature and World Literature—Elements of Space.

Between Comparative Literature and World Literature there exists a difference of degree. Comparative Literature comprises elements of space. It often deals with the relationship of only two countries, or two authors of different nationality. (eg) the Franco-German literary relations. But World Literature implies recognition throughout the world.

Element of Time.

World Literature suggests an element of time. That is, World Literature deals with literature consecrated as great by the test of time. Comparative Literature may compare anything that is comparable, no matter how old or recent the work may be; but World Literature deals predominantly with time and world-honoured literary productions of enduring quality. For example, The Divine Comedy by Dante, Paradise Lost by Milton and Don Quixote by Cervantes; or with authors of our own day, who have enjoyed intense applause abroad. Faulkner, Camus and Thomas Mann belong to the second

category. Comparative Literature is not bound to the same extent by criteria of quality or intensity. Many comparative studies could be successfully carried out on second-rate authors.

Differences between Comparative Literature and World Literature.

Elements of space, time, quality and intensity provide differences of degree between Comparative Literature and World Literature. There are a few fundamental differences. The concept of Comparative Literature embraces inquiries into the relationship between literature and other orbits. World Literature does not. Comparative Literature specifies a method but World Literature does not. Again, in Comparative Literature, a work, author, trend or theme is actually compared to a work, author, trend or theme of another country or sphere. Many of the world's masterpieces are read in translations. They are studied as individual masterpieces but not systematically compared.

General Literature.

Like National Literature, General Literature is also closely associated with the origin and development of Comparative Literature. The contributor of the term, 'General Literature,' Paul Van Tieghem, the renowned French comparatist, distinguishes the two by saying that Comparative Literature confines itself to the study of binary links between two elements, whether these elements be individual works or group of works or writers or entire literatures. Literary phenomena concerning three or more elements or writers are marked by the area of General Literature. Under the head of General Literature, Paul Van Tieghem lists the topics like the study of international currents

such as Petrarchism and Rousseauism, the problems of literary history and concepts like humanism, symbolism, etc.

The term 'General Literature' has also been used for courses and publications concerned with foreign literature in English translation or subjects that appear to be of interest to students outside one National Literature. Sometimes, it refers to literary trends, problems and theories of general interest or to aesthetics. Collections of texts, and of critical studies or comments dealing with several literatures have been assigned to this category. Like World Literature, General Literature also fails to prescribe a comparative method of approach.

Levels of National Literature, Comparative Literature and General Literature.

According to the French Comparatist, Paul Van Tieghem, National Literature, Comparative Literature and General Literature represent three consecutive levels. National Literature treats questions confined to one National Literature; Comparative Literature normally deals with problems involving two different literatures; and General Literature is devoted to developments in a larger number of countries. " Expressed visually, National Literature would be the study of literature within walls, Comparative Literature, across the walls and General Literature above the walls."

Conclusion.

Finally, one has to note that the definitions between National Literature and Comparative Literature are sufficiently clear to be useful. World Literature is a serviceable term but not to be loosely used. But, 'General Literature' may be avoided, wherever possible.