3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will introduce you to the relatively new area of literary study, comparative literature or more accurately, comparative literature studies. It will begin with a brief account of the evolution of the concept of comparative literature and will then discuss the relevance of the idea in a multilingual and multi-cultural country like India. It will finally deal with issues and approaches and methods of study of Indian Comparative Literature. It will also glance at the enabling role of translation in the study of comparative Indian literature. After reading the unit, you will be better acquainted with issues in comparative literature studies.

3.1 WHAT IS ‘COMPARATIVE LITERATURE’?

3.1.1 Introduction

‘Comparative literature’ is a study of more than one literature in relation to one-another. It is also a study of the relationship between literature on the one
hand and other areas of knowledge and belief and fine arts and films on the other. In other words, it is a comparative study of one literature with another literature, or with a subject relating mainly to the areas of humanities, and social sciences or the arts. And those scholars who work in the field of comparative literature studies are known as comparitists. For instance, a study of partition literature produced in India and Pakistan would fall under the category of comparative studies in literature. In the same way, a study of partition novels in India and the films produced on the subject would also fall under the same category.

The term ‘comparative literature’ is really a misnomer because it is not used to identify or classify any particular literature but to refer to a method of studying literature. So when the term comparative literature is used, we are really talking of comparative literature studies or comparative studies in literature.

3.1.2 The Evolution of the Idea of Comparative Literature Studies

The comparative study of literature is as old as literary criticism. For instance, Aristotle’s approach to the study of literature was comparative. He brought into his discourse the question of relationship between poetry, history and philosophy and took recourse to a comparison between poetry and painting. The ancient Romans had realized the importance of comparative literary studies as they noticed the vast influence of Greek literature on Latin. (Students will recall that the introductory unit of Block I, MEG-1: British Poetry discusses in detail the relations between poetry and painting with the help of pictures.)

The beginnings of comparative literature studies could be traced to the work of mythologists and ancient literary historians in Germany and in France. It was realized that literatures do not remain confined to the political boundaries of the countries of their origin and that they often interact. The historical connections between modern European literatures and classical literatures were too obvious, but the relationship among the modern languages and literatures themselves received fresh critical attention in this period. European scholars who found remarkable similarities in the linguistic patterns and the mythological structures also paved the way for the study of commonness of various literatures. This phase of comparative literary study was confined mainly to the study of influence of one literature on another, or of one writer on another, or of one text of a language on another text written in another language. French scholars constructed an elaborate scheme of detecting the influence of language ‘A’ on language ‘B’ and to analyze as well as to find out the channels of influences. Such a scenario could be visualized as the first phase of comparative literature studies as an academic discipline.

Matthew Arnold was probably the first to coin the world Comparative Literature in English. In a letter to his sister, Arnold wrote (May 1848): “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”. In all probability, Arnold translated the phrase Literature Comparee used by the French scholar Villemain in 1829. Furthermore, it could be stated that Matthew Arnold was the first creative writer and critic who pointedly referred to the need for comparative literary
studies. In his inaugural lecture delivered at Oxford in 1857, Arnold emphatically stated:

The spectacle, the facts, presented for the comprehension of the present age, are indeed 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 event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to 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.

While Matthew Arnold emphasized the need for comparative literature study, H.M. Posnett, an eminent Irish barrister-turned-comparatist from Britain who later became a professor of Classics and English literatures at the University College, Auckland, wrote what is probably the first book on the subject, *Comparative Literature* (1886) in any language. Thus Posnett is considered the first scholar who wrote a book which exclusively dealt with the methods and principles of a new field. He defined comparative literature as “the general theory of literary evolution, the idea that literature passes through stages of inception, culmination and decline”. Posnett’s definition of comparative literature was found to be inadequate by later scholars who didn’t accept Comparative Literature merely as a “general theory of literary evolution”, and who tried to define its business more clearly. It has been argued that comparative literature is neither a general history of literature, nor world literature, but a study of literatures in contact at a particular historical time and place.

In the United States the first course devoted solely to comparative literature studies was given at Cornell University in 1871 by the Reverend Charles Chauncey Shackford and then by Charles M. Gayley at the University of Michigan from 1887 to 1889. The oldest American department of comparative literature was the one founded in 1899 at Columbia University. George E. Woodberry headed the department. He identified the study of “sources, themes, forms environments and artistic parallels” as the chief concerns of his discipline, thus combining sociological perspective with traditional areas. However, it was not till the post-war years that Comparative Literature Studies were established firmly as discipline in the United States. Many journals were launched and according to a survey published in Volume Twenty (1971) of the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature*, there were over seventy degree granting programs in the United States alone. At a distance from the nationalistic favour of the European states, the American School took interdisciplinary as its key component. Right from the very beginning there was also a tendency to see comparativism in idealistic transnational terms with assumptions regarding the humanizing power of great works of art.

In the seventies, with the advent of the epoch of theory, Comparative Literature departments became centres of theoretical work. Although, theory for many was linked with deconstruction and its practices, comparative literature studies were never really taken over by deconstructive theory with its undecidability and comparisons that would end in indifference. Rather,
there was a strong impact of theories which involved fresh insights from ethical perspectives related to social practices. Various questions regarding the nature of literature’s relation to experience, to ideology, of the relationship between gender and power which were being asked within feminism and other schools of thought became important. Foucault’s study of discourse associated with the regulatory mechanism of power and Bakhtin’s theory of the dialogic imagination and of language as a highly variable set of discourses brought new dimensions to the study of literature. There was also the influence of New Historicism offering new contexts for reading literary texts. Colonial and post-colonial studies also came to occupy a very important position after the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and works by Gayatri Chakrabarty Spivak and Homi Bhabha. However, what has been stated above is true not just of the United States, but of comparative literature studies in different parts of the world as well.

3.1.3 Definitions

The American View

A useful and pragmatic definition of comparative literature has been given by an American scholar S.S. Prawer. He states that comparative literature study is “an examination of literary texts (including works of literary theory and criticism) in more than one language, through an investigation of contrast, analogy, provenance or influence; or a study of literary relations and communications between two or more groups that speak different languages”. In fact, American scholars extended the area of comparative literature to other arts as well. In this context, the following definition which contains a new definition of comparative literature is also an example of the flexibility of American school of comparative literature. It comes from Henry H. Remak, known as ‘one of the most distinguished scholars and also one of the greatest exponents of Comparative Literature in our time from America. Remak states:

Comparative Literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of relationship between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g. politics, economic, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief, it is the comparison of one literature with other spheres of human expression.

This comprehensive definition not only increases the scope of Comparative Literature Studies but also it increases its manifold functions especially in the areas of other arts.

The French View

French scholars underlined the importance of the study of ‘influence’ or ‘relationship’ as a necessary element of comparative literature study in order to understand and appreciate the course of literary development. Paul Van Tieghem, a French scholar, wrote in 1921 that general literature studies movements and fashions, transcends national lines, while the comparative literature studies focus on the interrelationships between two or more literatures. He stated that ‘the object of Comparative Literature is essentially the study of diverse literatures in their relations with one another’. Another
French scholar M.F. Guyard defined Comparative Literature as ‘the history of international literary relations’. As a matter of fact it can be stated that the French scholars of comparative literature studies gave importance to ‘factual contacts which took place between Byron and Pushkin, Goethe and Carlyle, Walter Scott and Vigny, between the works the inspirations and even the lives of writers belonging to several literatures’.

**The Indian View**

The idea of comparative literature in India was first introduced by Rabindranath Tagore in an essay entitled “Visva-Sahitya” [World Literature] (1906). Tagore took the idea of Goethe’s World Literature and explained it further. He states: “Just as the world does not mean my land, your land and his land and to think thus of the world is to think in a parochial way, so literature is not my work. We are in the habit of seeing literature in this fragmented way. We must now free ourselves from narrow parochialism and discover the image of mankind in World Literature”. Besides Tagore, many other nationalists, leaders and philosophers including Sri Aurobindo also talked about Indian literature in a wide perspective, though comparative literature was perhaps not central to their thought. It was only after the establishment of the Department of Comparative Literature at Jadavpur University in 1956, that several Indian scholars including Buddhadev Bose (1908-), the first Professor of the subject in India became seriously concerned about the nature of the subject and its methodology.

The contemporary Indian literary critics have realized the importance of comparative literature studies as a new space to understand the significance and uniqueness of each Indian literature, which had been operating in isolation within the departmental system in our universities. Comparative Study of Indian Literature is, therefore, the study of the literature of one nation, though written in many languages. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan said: “Indian Literature is one, though written in many languages”. In that sense a comparative study of Indian literature is the study of the literature of one nation that appears as regional literatures. Sisir K. Das, through his monumental writings and lectures delivered on the subject pleaded eloquently for the abolition of the walls dividing the different literature departments in Indian universities and to create a new consciousness of literature, interdependent and interrelated. In his article ‘Muses in Isolation’, he wrote: “The teaching of literature must have a hardcore or national literature, but it must accommodate the literatures of other cultures”.

### 3.2 COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE

#### 3.2.1 Introduction

It will not be wrong to say that Comparative Studies in Indian Literature come as naturally to Indian linguistic and literary situation as petals to a rose flower. India is a multilingual and multicultural society and the very structure, framework, text and context of Indian literature have an inbuilt comparative system. The statement is elaborated further and it is pointed out that ‘there is a major distinction between Comparative India Literature and Comparative Western Literature. One is comparative literature in a multilingual situation, the other comparative literature in a diverse world of many languages. One is comparative as such, the other has to work out the comparisons.’
As in the case of Greek and Roman literatures, the criterion of informal studies in comparative contexts was observed in the ancient literatures of India. Sisir K. Das aptly pointed out: “That the ancient Indian writers could use more than one language within one text without qualms, and the ancient critics found that practice normal enough, is itself an evidence of a view of literature that extends beyond one language”. One of the interesting evidences of such an interaction between two Indian languages is to be seen in the growth of a style known as *manipravalam*. This was an attempt and quite a successful one towards creation of a hybrid style composed of Sanskrit and Malayalam. The fourteenth century text *Lilatilakam*, written in Sanskrit, deals with grammar and rhetorical devices of *manipravalam*. This is the first work in Indian criticism which analyses a literary phenomenon which cannot be adequately understood without involving two languages and two literatures. Another oft-quoted example is of Charles E. Gover’s *The Folk-Songs of Southern India* (1871). The book is a study of several old literatures taken as a single corpus of poetry providing a comparative critical framework.

### 3.2.2 Multilingual and Multicultural Traditions

Since ancient times, India has consistently remained a land of bilingual, multilingual and multicultural traditions. This specific socio-cultural phenomenon has been witnessed as a hallmark of Indian literature, ever since the origin and development of almost all the regional Indian languages have taken place. When we go back to ancient and medieval periods and study the linguistic and literary history of India, we find a series of works which show “simultaneous and co-lateral” growth of religious poetry in the regional languages spread all over the country. For instance, to quote from *Comparative Literature: Indian Dimensions*, the devotee poets from regional language literatures are described in the following order: “Basavesvara in Kannada (12th C); Baba Farid in Panjabi (12-13th C); Jnanadeva in Marathi (13th C); Tikkanna in Telugu (13th C); Namdeo in Marathi (13-14th C); Chandidas in Bengali (14th C); Lall Ded in Kashmiri (14th C); Vidyapati in Maithili (15th C); Kabir in Hindi (15th C); Narasi Mehta in Gujarati (15th C); Banda Nawaz Gis Daraz in Urdu (15th C); Mirabai in Rajasthani (16th C); Surdas in Brajabhasha (16th C); Sankaradeva in Assamese (16th C); Haba Khatoon in Kashmiri (16th C); Ezhuttachchan in Malayalam (17th C); the Panca Sakhas in Oriya (16th C); Akho in Gujarati (17th C); Ksl rayya in Telugu (17th C); Sant Tukaram in Marathi (17th C); Vemana in Telugu (17th C); Shah Latif and Sachal Sarmast in Sindhi (18th C); Tyagaraja in Kannada (18-19th C); Dayaram in Gujarati (18-19th C); or the long illustrious line of poets in Tamil from Andal (8th C) down to Tayumanavar (18th C).

These works make us believe how strong, deep-rooted and ancient are the ties of regional Indian literatures among themselves. They have grown in close interaction and from a common root of imaginative resource. They provide a new dimension to the study of existing Indian language-literatures and help discover their mutual historical and aesthetic inter-dependence and interrelations.

The concept of sharedness in comparative Indian literature is visible from the above examples, which suggests that this sharedness of Indian literatures written in many languages has been a fact of Indian literary history. It denotes a common heritage, which is seen as an essential basis of unity and diversity.
in the Indian situation. This view has been examined by literary critics and historians by referring to ancient and medieval literary traditions such as Nath Literature, devotional poetry and ramifications of literary classics such as The Mahabharata and The Ramayana in the various Indian languages. There are in fact certain pockets of bilingualism and multilingualism in various regions of India.

### 3.2.3 Comparative Studies in Indian Literature and Indian Writing in English

Very soon after the consolidation of the British-empire there emerged a new stream of English writing in India. By the beginning of the twentieth century this new literature, Indian writing in English, came of age and produced a substantial corpus of literary texts which claimed serious consideration from the critics. This literature was inspired by the English language and it was for sometime considered a part of the Anglo-Indian literary traditions. This literature can thus be legitimately called a bi-product of the interactions between the literatures of two countries, India and England. It provides a new area of comparative literature involving the Indian experience and Indian literary traditions on the one hand and the English linguistic tradition on the other.

There has been enthusiastic involvement in the pursuit of comparative Indian literature studies on the part of Indian teachers of English. This has been commented upon by a comparatist as a ‘foretaste of better things to come’. One may visualize two patterns emerging out of this interaction: (a) Those who feel inclined to promote studies in Indian literature seem to have accepted not only the continued use of English in India, but also the significant reality of creative writing in English by Indians. In fact they forcefully argue that it is no use condemning the Indo-English writer’s choice to make an acquired tongue (English) rather than his own mother-tongue the medium of his creative expression. As Sri Aurobindo has rightly stated: “It is not true in all cases that one can’t write first-class things in a learnt language” (Collected Works). (b) Secondly, Indo-English writers themselves have realized that the Indo-English literature written by them is after all one of the Indian literatures even though (paradoxically as it may seem) English is not exactly one of the “Indian” languages. And hence, it is believed that the sooner the Indo-English literature begins to interact with other Indian writers and writings, the better it would be for the growth of comparative studies in Indian literature.

### 3.3 COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE: APPROACHES

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

The immense possibilities of comparative studies in Indian literature were, in fact, realized only after the Constitution of free India accorded recognition to major Indian languages of the country. At present there are more than twenty-two independent literary languages in India. Every year, the literary work adjudged best in each language — including English, is ceremoniously conferred an award by the central body of letters, Sahitya Akademi. Taking the cue from what Sri Aurobindo describes as a “rich variety in the unity of Indian culture and literature”, the important question of the oneness of Indian literatures has invariably been debated at length in numerous literary seminars.
and conferences as also in articles and books by eminent creative writers and critics over the years.

We can refer to various methodologies, which have been followed as possible approaches to the study of this new area. These approaches are based on one or two important assumptions. The first relates to the fact that Indian literature is an offspring and intimate expression of a composite socio-cultural unit. The underling conviction, as Krishna Kripalani states it, is that “Like the Indian civilization of which it is more or less a faithful expression. Indian Literature, is a composite growth reflecting the impact of diverse ages, races, religions and influences, and maintaining simultaneously, sometimes in harmony, sometimes disharmony, different levels of cultural consciousness and intellectual development”.

The second assumption is the one which recalls Dr. Radhakrishnan’s often quoted dictum: “Indian Literature is one, though written in many languages”. One can prepare a long list of writings that substantiate this view. The list would include titles like The Literary Unity of India by Suniti Kumar Chatterji and Literatures in the Modern, Indian Languages by V.K. Gokak, to mention only two. For others please see the titles mentioned in the end of the unit.

Though it is difficult to frame a list of fool-proof methodologies for Comparative Studies in Indian literature, a few approaches are being suggested below. These approaches include those that have been tried or are being used for research in the area.

3.3.2 Methodology Based on the Proximity of Two or Three Indian Language Literatures

This approach envisages a multi-literary methodology for making a comparative study of Indian literature. I take the liberty of explaining this point by quoting an illustration given by Amiya Dev. In his “How to do Comparative Indian Literature”, Amiya Dev says that all the twenty-two Indian languages-literatures can’t be approached simultaneously for that would sound “euphoric or perhaps utopian”. His suggestion is to work out a viable methodology depending on the proximity of two or three languages. One can think of two/three language clusters like the following:

- Bengali-Hindi
- Bengali-Assamese
- Bengali-Oriya
- Punjabi-Hindi
- Tamil-Malayalam

- Bengali-Hindi-Oriya
- Bengali-Hindi-Assamese
- Bengali-Oriya-assamese
- Panjabi-Hindi-Urdu
- Tamil-Malayalam-Kannada

Amiya Dev explains that in addition to proximity of languages, one can think of proximity of communities belonging to distinct languages in certain areas for such clusters formation. For instance, in Calcutta, one can think of clusters like Bengali-Marathi, Bengali-Gujarati, Bengali-Punjabi, Bengali-Tamil. Similarly, in Delhi one can think of a number of two or three language clusters such as Hindi-Punjabi-Urdu, Hindi-Bengali-Oriya, Hindi-Bengali-Assamese, etc.
3.3.3 Influence or Impact Studies

The approach involved in studying the influence of one author on another and reception study of one literary movement on another literature has been both very interesting and very fruitful in the realm of Comparative Literature research. First of all, this trend helps us to identify a creative relationship that already exists, for instance, between Indo-English literature and the Indian literature in regional languages. This corpus of literature can be studied from different aspects — such as influence, impact and reception as well as from thematic similarities and differences and as a part of two different historical traditions. The comparative studies undertaken invariably fall into one or other of the following three classes: (a) The “influence” study involving impact of a tradition upon an individual author and/or his works, such as “Western Influence on the fiction of Aguaya (Hindi Novelist)”, or “The Influence of Eastern Thought on Thoreau”; (b) case studies comparing two or more authors and their literary works such as “Rabindranath Tagore and T.S. Eliot: A Union of Aesthetic Sensibilities” or “Croce and Tagore: A Study in Expression”; and (c) thematic study of the Indo-English novel in comparison with fiction in an Indian language in the context of shared common cultural or historical experiences such as the pre-colonial (ancient, classical and medieval) cultures, the colonial (the British) cultural impact, and the post-colonial cultural developments. Examples of such studies are: “The Anti-Colonial Hero in Mulk Raj Anand’s Sword and the Sickle and Premchand’s Godan”, The East-West Encounter in the fiction of R.K. Narayan (Indo-English) and Nanak Singh (Panjabi)” and “The theme of partition in Khushwant Singh’s Train to Pakistan (Indo-English), Bisham’s Tamash (Hindi), K.A. Abbas’s Inqilab (Urdu) and Nanak Singh’s Ag Di Khed (Panjabi)”. Examples could easily be multiplied.

3.4 THE ROLE OF TRANSLATION IN COMPARATIVE INDIAN LITERATURE

3.4.1 Introduction

In a multilingual country like India, which has twenty-four regional languages contributing to the richness of Indian literature, translation studies have acquired more relevance and importance. Translation activity is now being looked upon as a primary shaping force within the literary history of Indian literature.

Translation Studies have not only flourished but have contributed significantly for making it as an essential priority area for the study and development of comparative studies in Indian literature. Sujit Mukherjee’s remarks in this context are quite pertinent: “Practically every English language publisher of repute in India — and a few disreputable ones as well — is busy building a list of titles in translation as rapidly as possible. Writers themselves are no less eager to get translated into English. Some don’t even tarry for a translator, or cannot trust such intervention, and do the job themselves. Others would like to be translated by a foreigner. When none in available, they settle for Indians living abroad in English-speaking countries. Only those who are truly bereft of contact or resources have to make do with an Indian translator — a friend or that friend’s wife, some hitherto unknown admirer, a faithful fan or otherwise breezy devotee and so on. As was said of Cleopatra, the variety is endless and the number keeps growing.
3.4.2 Translation in Practice

Picking up a cue from the above insightful remark, it may be stated that in the comparative study of Indian literature, translation has occupied an immense potential as a pedagogical and integrative force. In the corpus of translated literature, we may discern a few clear-cut sub divisions:

Firstly, works in Indian languages translated into English by the authors themselves. The often-quoted example in this case is that of Tagore, as the translation of *Gitanjali* was rendered by the poet himself from the original Bengali. But there are many other writers, for instance, Raj Gill, K.S. Duggal in Panjabi, who not only wrote in their mother tongue but also translated the scripts into English themselves.

Secondly, works in Indian languages translated into English by Indian and Europeans as well. For instance, U.R. Anantha Murthy’s *Sanskara* which is translated from Kannada into English by A.K. Ramanujan. Such examples can be multiplied.

3.4.3 Translation of Indian Literature by Western Scholars

Translation of Indian literary text into English started with the initiative of English scholars during the British regime. There is a famous example of comparison of seven significant English translations of *Gita Govinda* by William Jones (1792), Edwin Arnold (1875), George Keats (1940) and also by Lakshmi Narayan Shastri (1956) Duncan Greenidge (1962), Monika Varma (1968), Barbara Stoler Miller (1977).

Literary works have translated into English, restructuring it into equivalent textual material of the target language. In simple words, the process is described as transcreation. The famous example is the translation of *The Rubaiyats of Omar Khayyam* (1858) by Edward Fitzgerald (1809-63). He was proud of his transcreation: “I would rather have a live sparrow than a stuffed eagle”. These attempts show the possibility of a comparative study of a single source text translated by one or more than one eminent scholar-translator.

3.5 NEW AREAS OF COMPARATIVE STUDIES IN INDIAN LITERATURE

3.5.1 Indian Mystical and Philosophical Tradition and the Anglo-American Response

It is not only that Anglo-American writers responded creatively to the Indian literary texts of the medieval or modern period but that the ancient traditions of philosophy had an impact on various poets and writers in the 19th and early twentieth century. One finds similarities of thought between Wordsworth and Indian philosophy and occasionally between Shelley and the Vedanta.

Similar affinities can be found between the Upanishadic thought and the world view of Emerson and Thoreau and Whitman. T.S. Eliot who was a student of Sanskrit and Indian philosophy incorporated some of the major thoughts of the
Upanishads in his The Wasteland (1922). He considered the Bhagwat Gita as one of the greatest religious poems of the world and it is quite clear that some of the basic philosophical doctrines of Bhagwat Gita contributed to the making of the world of his poetry. Nigel Leask in his well-researched work British Romantic Writers and the East (1993) demonstrates the relation between Byron, Shelley and Coleridge and India. He refers to Byron’s Eastern Tales which he describes as a sample of the oriental. Similarly the Brahmins, temples and pyres have found romantic representations in Shelley’s poetry. John Drew in his India and the Romantic Imagination (OUP, 1987) presents a very fascinating narrative of the British response to Indian poetry and mythology beginning with Sir William Jones’ writings on India and points out the later works by poets like Coleridge, Shelley and finally the novelist F.M. Forster. In the Preface to Prometheus Unbound, Shelley’s account of his emulation of the imaginary of the Greek poets ‘drawn from the operations of the human mind, or from those external actions by which they are expressed’ (SPW, p. 205), suggests a linkage in his mind between the Greeks and the oriental poets discussed by Jones in his On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations and Essay on the Arts, called Imitative, (Nigel Leask, p. 141). There is a wide scope to study the various areas of affinities between the romantic poets and Indian mystical traditions as they are yet to be properly worked out. Several English writers, Kipling and Forster, for example, though poles apart in their understanding of India, presented fascinating narratives of Indo-English cultural encounters.

From the early periods of Indo-British relationships numerous writers have written on their Indian experiences, many of which are forgotten today (for instance, those narrating the experiences of Sepoy mutiny), but the present has a long and complex history of the confrontations and relationships between two cultures and two people. There are sensitive accounts of this history to be found in Edward Thomson’s novels in India as well as accounts of imperialistic bigotry and insularity in numerous others, travelogues, diaries, memories, that were produced during the colonial periods. India became a part of British imagination and it occupied several English writers covertly as well as overtly.

3.5.2 New Literatures in English

Literatures in English began to emerge in countries that had once been colonized by the British Empire. In this context one can mention African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island and Sri Lanka. There were various stages of the development of English texts produced in the colonies corresponding to stages of national consciousness and the project of moving away from the Imperial centre. The first texts in the colonies were often produced by representatives of imperial power, travelers and memoir writers. The second stage marks the writings of those privileged classes who had gained access to the language producing literature under the ‘imperial gaze’, such as the large body of nineteenth century poetry and prose in English in India. It is only in the later stages that there is a tendency to move away from the ‘centre’, to use the language in new and distinctive ways, often be subversive and explore their rich native traditions within the English language. An exploration of how new literatures in English differ often lead to new insights into questions of tradition and identity.
New writings in English enlarge the scope of comparative literary studies. It includes the rich corpus of diaspora writings. There are two types of writings, which invariably appear in the category of **Writers of Indian Diaspora**. The first set of writers of Indian origin are those who continue writing in their mother tongue such as Gujarati, Panjabi, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil etc. while they are settled in the country of their immigration such as Canada, USA and UK. The themes of their writings mostly relate to the question of individual identity, fond memories of the places where the writers had lived in and the social and economic problem of the double binding in the case of migrated women. “These images, verbal, auditory or visual, play a crucial role in shaping diasporic subjectiveness”. (Satchidanandan, p. 30). The second category includes those who prefer to write in the language of the migrated country; it is English in most cases. The discernable denominator in both the categories is the choice of the same subject matter. Interestingly, when analyzed from a comparative framework, most of the writers of diaspora deal with the experiences of migrancy which evoke their responses to a syndrome of ‘home country versus migrated country’. They often cross over from one culture to another, which in a comparative context is termed as ‘bicultural pulls’. The list of the writers of diaspora, who deal with such sensitive questions in their fiction, poetry and prose writings is quite long, yet some names whose writings could be studied as part of Comparative Studies in Indian Literature includes Uma Parameswaran, Bharati Mukherjee, M.G. Vassanji, Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Iqbal Ramoowalia (Panjabi and English) and many more.

3.5.3 Poetics of the Margin

Over the last few decades it has been observed that dominant cultures have hegemonized and marginalized many vital and rich but less fortunate literatures in all parts of the globe including in India. Languages like Bhojpuri, Maithili, Rajasthani and many more have remained almost subjugated for quite a few decades. As a result, the process of canonization leading to mainstream literature, knowingly or unknowingly, succeeded in keeping the dalit and tribal literatures in a sort of suppressed situation. However, of late, this trend has been reversed and better results have started appearing in the corpus of Indian literature. Maithili has already been included by the VIIIth Schedule of Indian Constitution and a resurgent language is now producing vibrant modern literature. Rajasthani has also been included by the Sahitya Akademi in its activities. Among the tribal languages also, Bodo and Santali have been recognized by the Government of India. Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore has been assessing the status of such other tribal languages of the North-East like Khasi, Mizo, Garo etc. It will be a comparatist’s delight to study the transition from oral tradition to written tradition in those tribal languages which are rich in folklore.

There is a global recognition now that the history and literature of a country remains incomplete if the country’s aboriginal heritage gets ignored in its writing. A country’s literary history would further miss its core, if the voices of its ethnic, tribal and minority writers remain unheard and unrecorded. This phenomenon is of great importance in multilingual and multicultural societies such as ours. The plea in favour of retaining the pluralist heritage consisting of diverse ethnic and tribal communities is beautifully expressed thus in the report of a tribal commission: ‘Every flower has the right to grow according to
its own laws of growth; .... to spread its own fragrance, to make up the cumulative beauty and splendour of the garden. I would not like to change my roses into lilies nor my lilies into roses. Nor do I want to sacrifice my lovely orchids of rhododendrons of the hills'.

The importance and vastness of tribal literature can be judged objectively in two ways: a) by studying it as a body of literature consisting of diversified beliefs, myths and philosophies, especially of the Elders of the community and also emotional strains of autobiographical notes, b) by studying the literature found in the rich oral tradition of story telling, discourses, songs on the various occasion of life carrying the bitter sweet memories and prayers to the Great Spirit. The oral tradition is "the continuous flow of verbal interaction" that works as the fundamental reality of language. For instance, the oral literature of Canada's natives and India's tribals consist of formal narratives, informal story telling, songs and prayers as well as pungent political discourses. In fact in both cases and also in the corpus of other tribal literatures there exists a vast and remarkable diversified body of rich oral narratives.

An important area of study that has remained out of focus till recently is dalit literature written in different regions. Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, Telugu, Gujarati and other languages can now speak of sizeable dalit literatures and calls for comparative study. For instance, the narrative strategy of the dalit writer has become an important part of study of comparative literature. Another interesting study can be conducted on the positional difference between a dalit autobiography and a mainstream autobiography.

Similarly, the poetics of the margin also reflect women's voices. It is often said that the feminine mystique in literature is gradually yielding place to genuine women's voices where the bottled-up frustration, if not fury, of a thousand year's oppression are finding expression. The recent discovery of a number of nineteenth century texts like women's diaries and memoirs — all unpublished till the other day, shows that this frustration had always existed as a form of resentment. Since the Women's Lib and other such movements in the West, the Indian women also started becoming more and more liberated, and this has found expression in art and literature and has become an important area of comparative study of Indian literature. There is so much work that needs to be done that one can say that sky is the limit.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In a multilingual and multicultural country like India, Comparative Studies in Indian Literature have become the need of the hour and have made a space for themselves. The possibilities of such studies are enormous.

A welcome development has reportedly taken place at the new Dravidian University, where the School of Comparative Literary and Translation Studies has involved five departments i.e. Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and English and Communication, besides the study of Dravidian Folklore. This could be seen as the first step towards the demolition of walls between different literature departments in universities of which Sisir Kumar Das, the doyen of comparatists spoke. Comparative Indian Literature and Translation Studies are in the process of becoming an integral part of the courses of study
at graduate and post-graduate levels. We can say with confidence that this is, indeed, a foretaste of better things to come in the ripe field of Comparative Studies in Indian literature.

3.7 GLOSSARY

Manipravalam: a hybrid style composed of Sanskrit and Malayalam or Tamil. Such hybridization is the result of interaction between languages. In his book *A History of Indian Literature: 1800-1910 Western Impact: Indian Response*, Sisir K. Das refers to the song *Vande Mataram* as ‘an instance of modern manipravala it being written in a mixture of Sanskrit and Bengali’. (346)


3.8 QUESTIONS

1. In what sense is the term ‘comparative literature’ a misnomer?
2. Account for the rich scope for comparative studies in Indian literature.
3. If you had to choose a language cluster to work upon, which language cluster would you choose and why?
4. Examine the presentation of women in the stories that you have read as part of your syllabus.
5. If you were to choose a subject for writing a paper of a comparative nature from the texts in your course, which one would you choose? Prepare an outline of your paper.

3.9 SUGGESTED READINGS


