

# COMPARATIVE LITERATURE IN CLASSROOM: A MODEL

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## Abstract

Many questions arise in understanding the texts produced in different locales within the bigger ambit of world literature. It is here, the need arises for applying various modes of enquiry in understanding them. Comparative literature can become a common platform for understanding different cultures and literatures. The present paper is a modest attempt towards introducing the concept of comparative literature to a fresh learner and then scaling the literatures of two different contexts (Dalit and African American) together for practical purposes. A model is proposed for discussing comparative literature in classroom Thus it becomes an authentic and unique research bringing theory and practice together.

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**Keywords:** Comparative literature, Dalit Literature, African American Literature, A model

## Introduction:

The world, today, has wonderfully come closer .The patterns of liberalization, privatization and globalization have inspired the people ,across the globe, towards an increasing trend of co-operation and intervention, not only in political and economic spheres but also in culture and its various artifacts especially literatures .We are so open to the identity and opinion of the other that the nouns like culture ,history, literature ,English etc. that have been used grammatically in singular , are popularly accepting the plural form today.

In such a scenario where many agents of civilization ply together at the same plank and at the same time, naturally, there emerges an urge to compare and contrast, and a need and scope of putting language and literature at par under comparative literature. The present paper is a modest attempt towards introducing the concept of comparative literature to a fresh learner and then scaling the literatures of two diversified contexts together for practical purposes. Thus it becomes an authentic and unique research bringing theory and practice together.

### **Comparative Literature: A Brief Introduction**

The Concept of Comparative Literature relates to the ideas of Goethe. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his project of the "world literature" (*Weltliteratur*) chalked out the framework of Comparative Literature. Transylvanian Hungarian Hugo Meltzl de Lomnitz's ,the founding editor of the journal *Acta Comparationis Litterarum Universarum* (1877), Irish scholar H.M. Posnett, the writer of *Comparative Literature* (1886) are among the founding fathers of this branch of human knowledge. The Russian Formalists find Alexander Veselovsky also as one of the founders. Comparative Literature in the words of Henry Remak is "the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of the relationships between literature on one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (e.g. painting, sculpture, architecture, music), philosophy, history, the social sciences, (e.g. politics, economics, sociology), the sciences, religion, etc., on the other. In brief it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression." (Henry Remak, 25)

The modern times expects certain new connotations from Comparative literature which is beautifully elucidated by Haun Saussy :

The premises and protocols characteristic of [comparative literature] are now the daily currency of coursework, publishing, hiring, and coffee-shop discussion. ... The 'transnational' dimension of literature and culture is universally recognized even by the specialists who not long ago suspected comparatists of dilettantism. .. Comparative teaching and reading take institutional form in an ever-lengthening list of places. ... Comparative literature ... now ... is the first violin that sets the tone for the rest of the orchestra. Our conclusions have

become other people’s assumptions. (Haun Saussy, *Comparative Literature in an Age of Globalization*, 24).

It will not be an overstatement if we call comparative literature as the UNO of literatures.

In the present paper, a model is being proposed for discussing comparative literature in classroom . Various steps are given in a sequence:

**Step 1: Recapitulation:** After a brief introduction of the concept of Comparative Literature , the following rubric will be given to the learners. For a better understanding of the concept and attaining the maximum level of SLOs, before taking this exercise in the classroom, the learners shall be advised fore hand for studying the concept, nature and development of comparative literature with the help of authentic references in print and on web.

**Rubric 1: Comparative Literature: Conceptual Understanding**

Note: Select the most appropriate option that matches the statement given in the 1st column from those given in the 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> columns, in each of the following :

Time: 20 Minutes.

1.	Comparative Literature is	a comparative literary work	a literary work in two languages	a specific discipline	literary phenomenon across the literary systems, languages and cultures
2.	Comparative Literature is	useful in publishing	useful in advertising	useful in librarianship	useful in publishing, advertising and librarianship
3.	Comparative Literature Includes the study of	orally transmitted literature	written literature	performed scripts	all kinds of dynamic, contextual literature including oral, written or performed ones
4.	Nature of Comparative Literature is	rigid	flexible	cursory acquaintance with great texts	referential
5.	Purpose of Comparative Literature is	to equip with methodologies of reading	to equip & train in the application of reading methodologies	to develop skills and insights regarding a particular	to develop ability to establish a particular purview

			to cultural texts	discipline	
6.	Comparative Literature establishes	relationship between art and culture	relationship between science and religion	relationship between literature, music & painting	relationship between Literature on one hand and other areas of knowledge, beliefs, all forms of art, sciences, religion, etc., on the other
7.	Comparative Literature is -	contextual study of world literature	consensual study of world literature	stipulative study of world literature	simulative study of world literature
8.	Comparative Literature is continuously connecting	a poem with dance	a film with novel	photography with essay	all the earlier options
9.	The term Comparative Literature is often exchanged with	history play	world history	world literature	cultural studies
10.	ICLA is	a society	a journal	a magazine	an association
11.	Modes involved in Comparative Literature are	inquiry through literary movements	investigation through history, theory and genre	understanding cultural significance and engagement in reading copious books	all the earlier options
12.	Comparative Literature is	transnational interdisciplinary and responsive humanities	a dialogic establishment	explorations of our past imagination	diverse human condition

Score \_\_\_\_\_ Out \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ 12.....  
 Signature/Name .....

**Note for the Teacher**

After twenty minutes the teacher shall read out the correct answers and the learners shall match their responses (The correct answers of the

Rubric1 are given as Appendix 1). Accordingly the learners shall evaluate their level of performance under the following criteria:

Score 10-12: Excellent

Score 8-10 Satisfactory

Score less than 8 Revision Required

If 90% learners reach satisfactory level the class should proceed for Step 2.

## **Step 2: Comparing Dalit Literature and African American Literatures**

In this task we shall evaluate the common traces and trajectories in Dalit and African American and literature. Under the preparatory activity the learners shall be refreshed with their previous knowledge of Dalit and African American and literature .

### **Dalit Literature : A Brief Introduction**

The term "Dalit literature" was used in 1958 for the first time during the first conference of *Maharashtra Dalit Sahitya Sangha* being held in Bombay (Mumbai). Inspired by the thoughts of thinkers like Jyotiba Phule and Bhimrao Ambedkar ,Dalit literature sketches the plight of the Dalit ,a historically deprived class of society in Indian social system. It is a major branch in contemporary India literature. Beginning in the Marathi language, the Dalit literature became popular in various Indian languages like Hindi, Telugu, Kannada, Tamil etc. Its presence on literary scene is visible in the post 1960 era. Dalit literature has become popular in English studies through translation of the major Dalit texts from Bhasa literature into English, and by original Dalit writing in English as well. Dalit literature can be compared with African –American literature in the depiction social exclusion, segregation, injustice, and various forms of tortures. Mohandas Naimishrai, Om Prakash Valmiki , Namdev Dhasal, Daya Pawar, Sharankumar Limbale, Sanjay Vitthal Baviskar, Madara Chennaiah ,Bama are some of the popular Dalit writers in India.

### **African American Literature: A Brief Introduction**

The term African American literature is used for the writing of the Americans of African descent. These writers focus on social discrimination, slavery, exclusion, inclusion, social justice, black feminism and many other similar issues in particular. It is around 1970 that the African American literature has emerged as a significant branch of literatures written in

English. It carries a rich African heritage , and also many tropes from African folk and cultural tradition.

In recapitulation part Rubric 2 will be given to the learners.

**Rubric 02: Comparing Dalit Literature and African-American Literature**

**Note:** Fill in the blanks selecting suitable options from the box:

Pedagogic, Repulsive, Abominable, Ethnification, African American, Hegemony, Equality, Liberty, Embryonic state, Africans, America, White denizens, African- American literature, Racial discrimination, Fraternity/reality, Varna ,India, Dalit issues, both the literatures ,reality

A comparative study between African American and Dalit literature can be particularly.....1.....as far as their forms are concerned. As far as the character of this comparison is concerned, both African American and Dalit literature are .....2.....and .....3.....While attempting a comparative study between African American and Dalit literature, there is a general pressure towards assimilation among various communities of the world, however there is always a risk of increasing.....4.....in the minds of people of different culture. Both ...5.....and Dalit literature have raised voice against the.....6..... of the established class. Both African American and Dalit literature advocate .....7.....and .....8.....In comparison to Afro-American literature, Dalit literature is in its .....9.....African American literature is by the.....10.....who were brought to .....11.....by the .....12.....as slaves to work on the plantations. The initial goal of .....13....was to abolish slavery which later turned into a struggle against .....14..... African -American literature has therefore, taken a shape from an expression of art to an expression of.....15..... Dalits were the victims of.....16..... (class) system that prevailed in ...17.....for centuries. The literature on ...18 ..is known as Dalit literature. A comparative study of ...19 .. establishes them as two different .....20..... yet similar when it comes to share equality, freedom and brotherhood in asserting their identity against the establishment of their respective society.

Score out of 20: ..... Name &  
Signature:.....

### **Note for the Teacher**

After twenty minutes the teacher shall read out the correct answers and the learners shall match their responses (The correct answers of the Rubric 2 are given as Appendix 2). Accordingly the learners shall evaluate their level of performance under the following criteria:

Score 15-20: Excellent

Score 10-15: Good

Score 8-10 Satisfactory

Score less than 10 Revision Required

If 90% learners reach satisfactory level the class should proceed for Step 3.

### **Step 3: Scaling the common traits**

Now we shall analyze two poems by two major poets from the literatures in question .These are “White Paper” by Sharankumar Limbale and "Negro" by Langston Hughes.

Sharankumar Limbale’s “White Paper”, addressing the plight of Dalits in India, shows strong similarities with “Negro” as far as the motif is concerned. In this poem the narrator demands the fundamental rights as a human being. It shows the plight of the Dalit class in India. They have been deprived of their human rights for ages .The poet writes, “I do not ask/for the sun and/moon from your sky/your farm, your land,/ your high houses or your mansions/I do not ask for gods or rituals,/castes or sects/or even for your mother, sisters, daughters./I ask for/ my rights as man.”(“White Paper”, Sharankumar Limbale).The poem is a vivid portrayal of the emotions emanating from the downtrodden class called Dalits. The Dalits have lived their lives in utter inhuman situations. The views of noted Dalit writer Om Prakash Valmiki are appropriate to share here. In *Joothan*, his Autobiography, he shares with the readers, “My village was divided along lines of touchability and untouchability. The situation was very bad in Dehradun and in Uttar Pradesh , in general ,at time when I saw well-educated people in a metropolitan city like Bombay indulging in such behaviour, I felt a fountain of hot lava erupting within me”(95).

The Dalits were not only deprived of their fundamental rights as a human being but also they were supposed to be a demeaning object rather a grave pollutant. To quote again the lines of Sharan Kumar Limbale, “Each

breath from my lungs/sets off a violent trembling in your text and traditions/your hells and heavens/ fearing pollution./Your arms leapt together/to bring to ruin our dwelling places./You'll beat me, break me,/loot and burn my habitation/But my friends!" ("White Paper").

The second work taken for the purpose is "Negro" by Langston Hughes. The plight of the African American has been successfully translated by the poet. Hughes begins the poem, "I am a Negro:/Black as the night is black,/Black like the depths of my Africa." ("Negro", Langston Hughes) The emotion intensifies in the lines: I've been a slave:/Caesar told me to keep his door-steps clean./I brushed the boots of Washington." ("Negro", Langston Hughes).

But the obstacles created by the unfavorable colonizing forces are challenged by the courage and vigor of the protagonist who makes a realization in the words: "I've been a worker:/Under my hand the pyramids arose./I made mortar for the Woolworth Building./I've been a singer:/All the way from Africa to Georgia/I carried my sorrow songs./I made ragtime./I've been a victim:/The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo./They lynch me still in Mississippi." ("Negro", Langston Hughes). These assertions prove him a master of all. His personality is proved to be a perfect blend of finer sensibilities and finer traits at par.

Langston Hughes belongs to the group of the poets of Harlem Renaissance of the 1920's. He has supported the associates of the Harlem renaissance who were expressing the racial pride through art, music, and literature. "Negro" is a true portrayal of the history of African Americans who have gone through the phase of trials and tribulations. The race has been portrayed to be comprising slave, workers, singers and victims who had suffered many forms of discrimination and exclusion. Thus it becomes a moving poem which shows the trails and travails that the African-Americans have braved throughout history. The poet gives a vivid description showing the torture on the masses and becomes a saga of the pain and exploitation of the downtrodden not only in a specific country but across the human civilization in different parts of the globe.

If we compare the plight of human being as reflected in both the poems in question, it is deplorable. Both the situations simply make the mockery of the very first article of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, which proclaims that, "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should



act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood” (‘Universal Declaration of Human Rights’, 1)

### **Conclusion**

Many important questions arise in understanding the texts, produced in different locales within the bigger ambit of world literature. It is here, the need arises for applying various modes of enquiry in understanding them. Comparative literature can become a common platform for understanding different cultures and literatures. The present model will certainly contribute to it.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Answers**

#### **Rubric A: Comparative Literature: Conceptual Understanding**

1. Literary Phenomenon across the literary systems, languages and cultures
2. Useful in Publishing, Advertising & Librarianship
3. All kinds of dynamic, contextual Literature including oral, written or performed ones
4. Flexible
5. To equip & train in the application of reading methodologies to cultural texts
6. Relationship between Literature on one hand and other areas of knowledge, beliefs, all forms of art, sciences, religion, etc., on the other
7. Contextual Study of World Literature
8. All the earlier options
9. World Literature
10. An association
11. All the earlier options
12. Transnational interdisciplinary and responsive humanities

## **Appendix 2**

### **Answers**

#### **Rubric B**

1. Pedagogic
2. Repulsive
3. Abominable
4. Ethnification
5. African American
6. Hegemony
7. Equality
8. Liberty
9. Embryonic state
10. Africans
11. America
12. White denizens
13. African- American literature
14. Racial discrimination

15. Fraternity/reality
16. Varna
17. India
18. Dalit issues
19. both the literatures
20. reality