

Elements of Literature and Creative Communication
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Lecture - 26
Contemporary World Poetry

Hi there, welcome to the 6th week of our course, Elements of Literature and Creative Communication. Last week, we discussed Indian English poetry; beginning with its roots, we traced Indian English poetry through the poetry of Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar, Dilip Chitre, Aurobindo, Kamala Das, and all these poets.

And now, this week, we are going to discuss Contemporary World Poetry. Before we discuss contemporary world poetry, we need to understand the concept of world literature.

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Goethe and World Literature

German poet, playwright, novelist, scientist, statesman, theatre director, critic, and artist; considered the greatest German literary figure of the modern era.

World literature was the cultural expression of a political order, one in which the world had moved beyond the nationalism and colonialism that were dominating the 19th century

The slide features a portrait of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in the center. To the left of the portrait is a text box with the title 'Goethe and World Literature' and a description of Goethe. To the right is a dark green vertical bar containing text about world literature. At the bottom right of the slide is a small inset photo of the lecturer, Prof. H S Komalesha.

Because in the traditional disciplines of Humanities and Social Sciences, world literature or studies related to world literature are gaining popularity, therefore let us quickly take a look at the concept of world literature itself and then move on to contemporary world poetry.

The moment we talk of world poetry as a distinguished discipline in the Humanities in general and literature in particular, we invariably think of Goethe because the concept of world literature as we understand the term today is attributed to Goethe.

And Goethe, as all of us know, was the national poet of Germany. He was not just a poet again, a versatile personality. He was a playwright, a novelist, a scientist, a statesman. So, the contribution of Goethe to German society and culture is invaluable; therefore, he is rightly considered the father of German literature in a broad sense.

In other words, he is considered a national poet of Germany. World literature as a concept is something like a cultural expression of political, geopolitical world order. One in which the world has moved beyond the narrow confines of nationalism and colonialism, and of course, the 19th century discourse, as a kind of breaking away from that kind of imperialistic discourses, world literature emerged. So, that is the background in which world literature emerges.

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The slide has a light orange background. At the top center, the word "Weltliteratur" is written in a small, dark font. Below it, on the left, is a dark teal rectangular box containing the text "Goethe: (1749-1832)" in a large, white, serif font. Underneath this, in a smaller white font, is a quote: "National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach". (1827). Below the quote, it says "Letters to Johann Eckermann; Weimar, a small town in Germany" in a smaller white font. To the right of the teal box is a small, square, inset image showing a man in a long, light-colored coat standing in a room, with another person seated at a desk in the background. At the bottom left of the teal box is a small icon of a globe on a stand next to a red and yellow suitcase. In the bottom right corner of the slide, there is a small video inset showing a man with glasses and a dark jacket speaking.

In fact, it begins with a story. We can discuss the origin of Goethe's concept of world literature as a kind of a story sometime in 1827; Goethe was interacting with his secretary cum friend cum confidante Johann Eckermann.

One day when Johann Eckermann went to meet Goethe, he found Goethe in a peculiar mood. So, he asks him the reason behind that, and that is when Goethe says it. In fact, before Eckermann entered the room, Goethe had just finished reading a Chinese novel, obviously, in translation.

Of course, it is also true that Goethe was a polyglot, but this particular Chinese novel was available to him through an English translation, and he had just finished reading it. And he said something remarkable about Chinese literature and Chinese novel.

And Eckermann thinks that it must be really unusual because, remember, in the west the concept of the novel was something as late as 16th century or early 17th century, whereas, in most of the eastern traditions, including India, our first ventures into the very genre of the novel or in the form of the novel were quite earlier.

Therefore, Goethe remarks that the concept of the novel is quite old as far as Chinese culture is concerned. And, by then, of course, he was also familiar with the works of Kalidasa, especially *Shakuntala*, and he was greatly influenced by the Persian poet Hafez.

So, back on his understanding and familiarity with all these writers, Goethe remarks to Eckermann that national literature is now a rather unmeaning term; it has lost its significance because the epoch of world literature is at hand, and all of us must strive to hasten its approach.

So, this is the remark that Goethe makes first, and that is when he uses the term German “world literature”; that is how the concept of world literature was born somewhere in a remote village or a small town in Germany called Weimar in 1827.

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The term is suggestive of:

- (a) a sum total of all national literatures
- (b) literary perspective and a new cultural awareness; and,
- (c) a sense of an emergent global modernity, that we now live in, thanks to technological interventions that have shrunk the globe into a village!

World Literature, in a modern sense, refers to literary works that are translated into multiple languages and circulated to an audience 'outside their country of origin'

Significance of the term



In order to understand the significance of the term, well, generally speaking, world literature in a contemporary sense refers to literary works that are translated into multiple languages and circulated to a wider audience outside their society of origin. Let us say for instance if a Hindi work is written, when it gets translated into Kannada, when it gets translated into Bangla, when it gets translated into Persian, when it gets translated into Japanese, that is when it has gained a kind of a wider circularity.

So, that is when we can say that the work of Hindi has entered into the portal of world literature. So, that is a commonsensical understanding, but in other words, it is a sum total of all national literature. We can say that world literature is a sum total of all national literature.

And, as far as a literary perspective and awareness are concerned, it creates new cultural dawn, it creates new literary dawn. And in terms of emergent global modernity, of course, we live in that it also refers to a kind of literature where the entire world becomes its reader. Remember, we are living in a world thanks to technological interventions, we are living in a world that has shrunk the globe into a village; that is why we call it a “global village.” Therefore everybody should have access to any great work of art. So, the term signifies all these important concepts.

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Fritz Strich

"A network that promotes a traffic in ideas between peoples' a literary market to which the nations bring their intellectual treasure for exchange"

Marx and Engels

: "World Literature is the quintessential literature of modern times: "National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures there arises a world literature."

World Literature as Network

World literature also has its supporters in the works of Fritz Strich and Marx and Engels, especially. Marx and Engels have important contribution. In fact, Marx and Engels

considered their *Manifesto* to be a work of world literature, it comes out sometime in the 1830s and 40s.

So, they consider their manifesto as a prototype of world literature which is why you find Marx and Engels remarking that world literature is the quintessential literature of modern times.

And, they have understood the pitfalls of national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness, and therefore, as a kind of a way out, they propose the concept of world literature. And today, more than looking at world literature as a sum total of all the works that are available for reading to the entire population of the globe, we consider world literature more as a kind of a network of ideas, cultural exchanges, and things like that.

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World Literature – David Damrosch

- ✓ World literature "encompasses all literary works that circulate beyond their culture of origin, either in translation or in their original language"
- ✓ "A work enters into world literature by a double process: first, by being read as literature; second, by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin".
- ✓ It is 'less a set of works than a network' of associations, circulations and reception.

David Damrosch, a remarkable scholar, and professor at the University of Harvard, has a major role to play in revitalizing the concept of world literature in contemporary times. Especially in the 21st millennium, he has played a major role in popularizing world literature as a distinct discipline to be studied across the globe in various departments of literature and languages.

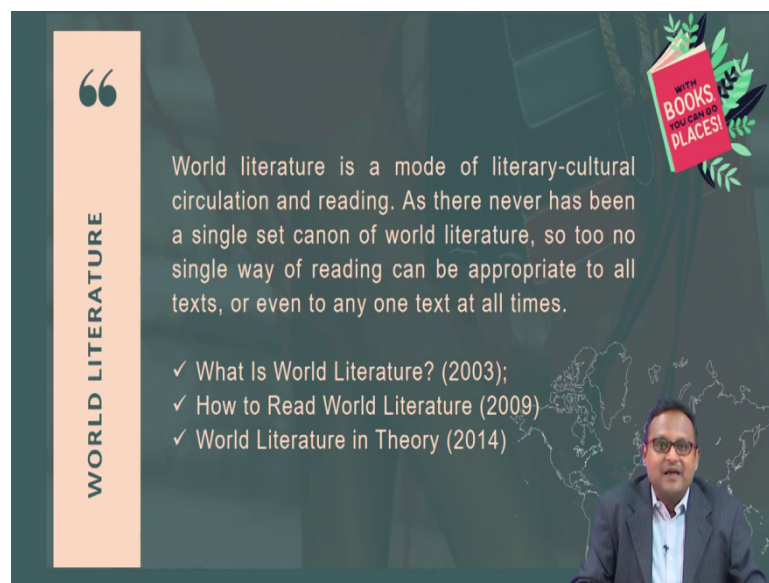
He defines world literature as something that encompasses all literary works circulate beyond their culture of origin either through translations or maybe in their original language because

if there is a reader who can read Hindi even outside India even then, of course, the work in Hindi has gained an audience outside India.

And through that reader, it might as well reach other readers. So, we can say that it has entered the portals of world literature. So, Damrosch identifies two stages through which a work of art enters into a global domain, two rites of passage in order for a work to be considered world literature.

First, by being read like great literature, it should be considered a classic or a great work of art in the language in the region, in the culture in which it is written, and second by circulating out into a broader world beyond its linguistic and cultural point of origin of course, here we make use of translation and other things.

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Here come his important works as far as World Literature is concerned, beginning with his work what is World Literature which was published in 2003, and he went on to write how to read World Literature and later in 2014, World Literature in theory. So, he goes on to say that world literature is a mode of sociopolitical literary-cultural circulation and reading.

And, of course, like there is never a set of the canon of world literature, the intention behind world literature is not to create a new canon of literature as such. Instead, like there is no single way of reading a text, there is also no single way of defining World Literature.

Broadly speaking, any great work of art that by virtue of translation or by virtue of extensive readership, has gone beyond the point of its origin and is available to the reader of the world is called world literature.

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Authenticity and Adaptation

- ✓ Rather than losing its specificity, a text gains in many ways when taken beyond its source.
- ✓ It undergoes necessary transformation cum metamorphosis through global circulation and translation;
- ✓ Text, Translation and its afterlife' -- Walter Benjamin
- ✓ World literature -- an amazing tool for analysing globalization as it provides a wonderful example of the ways that information is shared across languages and cultures.
- ✓ Literature as a single living organism, an interconnected whole without a centre. -- Tzvetan (1992)



The moment we say world literature, a couple of concerns come to our mind. The first quench concern is what happens to authenticity. Well, there are many critics who say that the moment you take a work out of its particular local remember we said that a work of art is a product of a cultural background in which it is written. The tradition, an entire society's culture, fauna, flora, everything will have gone into making a particular work of art.

So, when you take it out of its context, what happens? Does it close its authenticity? Does it lose its specificity? So, these are some questions; therefore, allaying to these fears and concerns, proponents of world literature say that rather than losing a work gains when it becomes a part of world literature. Of course, in the process, it has to necessarily undergo certain transformations or metamorphosis through global circulation.

It's not that the work would be received let us say, for instance, there is a classic written in Kannada literature. It is not that when it is translated and published outside Karnataka, it will be received in the same way it was received in Kannada; it is not. It has to undergo a certain transformation end in the process, it is bound to lose a few things, and it is also bound to gain a few things.

So, these are natural things, and that is why Walter Benjamin, a renowned translator, scholar, and translator theorist coined the term “afterlife” through translation, a work acquires an afterlife because if we consider work in the source language as having a life when you translate that work, what happens that work gains an extra lease and life.

Or it appears as a kind of an altar life; it appears in the form of an altar life in another language. Therefore, when a work of art enters a part of world literature, it gains an afterlife.

World literature also becomes an extraordinary tool, a remarkable tool in analyzing globalization; we are stuck in the concept of globalization, it has a lot many ramifications. Globalization has been studied extensively from an economic point of view, from a sociological point of view, but not so much from a cultural and literary point of view.

Therefore, world literature provides an interesting set of tools to look at the concept of globalization from a fresh perspective, from cultural perspective. This is where we can come to the concept of literature as a single living organism; this is Rabindranath Tagore’s concept. Like Goethe, Rabindranath Tagore to understand the concept and value of world literature quite at an early stage may be in 1903; he seemed to have remarked that cutting across the national boundaries, literature as such exists as a single organism in an interconnected universe.

Therefore, it has become a part of the global tradition. So, these are a couple of concerns that we can keep in mind as far as world literature is concerned when it enters through translation.

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Goethe

ON HIS WORKS AND THEIR TRANSLATIONS

- “I do not like to read my Faust any more in German. He remarks at one point, but in a new French translation he finds his masterwork “again fresh, new, and spirited”—even though the translation is mostly in prose.
- “mirroring”: finding the foreign perspective sharper and clearer than German criticism can be

Continuing our discussion of Goethe, Goethe was not very happy reading his own works and criticism of his works in German. That is when he seemed to have remarked, “I do not like to read my Faust anymore in German.”, but on the other hand, he is interested in its appearance let us say in French because in French it acquires a fresh taste a fresh color, and a different spirit. Therefore, when a writer comes across his own works that have appeared in a different language, it is going to revitalize the spirit of the writer as well, and moreover, a work will reveal several features that were hidden even from the author. So, that is why I said that when a work of art enters the world literature portal, it is going to reveal very many things.

So, and of course, here comes the concept of mirroring. When more than a reflection, what happens when a work gets translated into other languages and thereby enters the parlance of world literature? It acquires a kind of refraction more than the reflection of the original work or the so called source work, there is a refraction of that. And that is when it provides new insights to the writer who has written this.

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This is for all his pride in his own achievements and those of his fellow friends. Goethe has an uneasy sense that German culture is provincial; of course, that is what major writers felt right; even Tagore was quite skeptical of the entire nationalistic fervour.

Therefore, he proposes the concept of cosmopolitanism; through his poetry, he proposes universalism, the individual as a product of the universal. An individual more than a nationalistic dimension, an individual should appear as a kind in a universalistic dimension that is when he or she can grow; that was Tagore's concept that was true of Goethe as well.

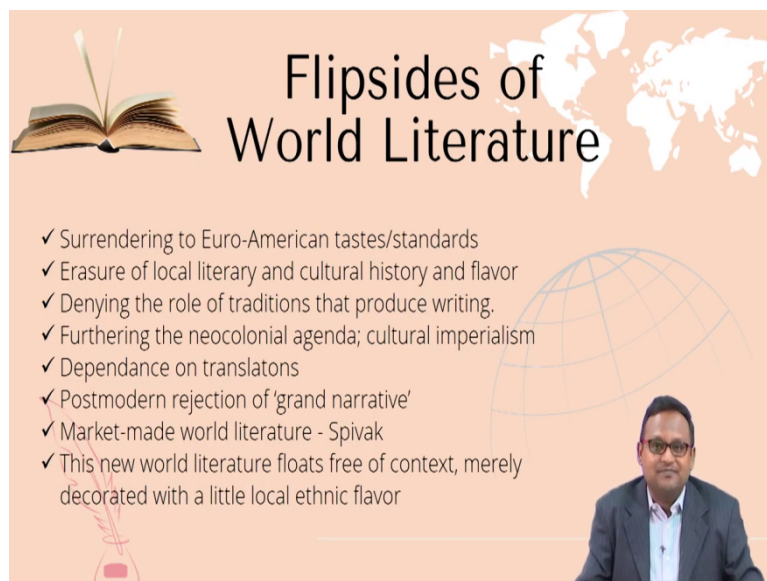
And all these great writers, at one point of time when they were really fed up with the provincial culture nature criticism is when they aspire that their work grows out of the national borders and reaches a wider audience across.

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That is why we say that when a work enters the world literature, it acquires a new lease and life. It is a new horizon for work. So, one of the poets who translated from English into Kannada was B. M Srikantaiah. He says, in his preface to his translation which is also in the form of a poem, he says what he has done through these translations is to look at to decorate Kannada using the clothes of English and see how the Kannada lady looks. So, in other words, what he is talking of is a cross-fertilization between two cultures' two literature and, as a result, a new lease and life that literary work gains.

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And it's also, of course, a very important thing when work gets censored in one part of the globe; obviously, because of its virtue of being world literature or as by virtue of being a part of world literature, it can be read in other parts.

So, when a particular regime tries to suffocate a literary work it finds a new life, a new birth, in other languages. So, these are some advantages of it. Of course, it is not any concept that has its flipside; therefore, many critics, many prominent ones, including Gayatri Spivak, is not very happy with this kind of sudden spurt in world literature.

Therefore, they feel that there is a kind of erasure of local literary traditions and cultures because, remember, this is the guise in which imperialism was furthered. Translation, we have already read extensively about how through translations of the orient, the imperialist agenda was furthered.

Therefore, critics, subaltern critics have every reason to be anxious about the fact that through the guise of world literature, neocolonialism's neocolonial agenda might as well be creeping in, and therefore, it might be robbing our own native cultures.

So, it has a valid fear, and moreover, well, when you say world literature, what do you mean by world literature? Probably you are talking about when work is available in English. That is when it becomes world literature because otherwise, how does it happen?

It is not that a work of art though it is written in Bangla or Odia, it becomes a part of world literature, of course, unless through translation there is no way through which a local word becomes world literature.

So, in other words, it is like surrendering to European American tastes and standards. So, if a work of art does not fit into that standard; however, great that work of art may be in a local culture that does not become a greater work, say, for instance, that is how a poet such as Bendre in the Kannada context we call him. His poetry is as good as the poetry of Pablo Neruda because his works are not translated properly. And, of course, they are so steeply rooted in the native culture that it becomes difficult to translate them into English successfully. And, even if you translate them, they become caricatures.

Therefore, through the process of translation, we also have to run the risk of losing our canons into secondary works that is when the world may perceive it as secondary work

whereas, in the culture that is produced their extraordinary works. So, these are some concerns that we have; however, by keeping these concerns in hand we have to discover ways of moving ahead and making available our great works of literature to a wider audience.

So, these are some things that we have to keep in mind. Keeping this spirit, what are we going to do this week? We are going to take up some extraordinary works written in different regions, national cultures, provincial cultures, and fortunately, which are available in English.

And we are going to discuss some of these works so that we also get a taste of how they sound. So, keeping the spirit of world literature in mind, we are going to introduce world poetry through translation. So, next class, we will come up with some major global poetry available to us in English translation; until then, take care bye.