

Tias Basu

Jadavpur University

Kolkata, India

Institutional Formations post 1947: Tracing the Early Developments of Comparative Literature in India

The idea of a national literature in India is quite different from any other nation-state due to the presence of numerous language based states which have their own corpus of literature. This paper will look into the formation of institutions and their structural changes post 1947, through which the process of reading Indian literature ultimately culminated into Comparative Literature in India. Establishment of the Sahitya Akademi, as a part of the nationalist idea of the Indian National Congress, will be one of the primary concerns of this paper. The Sahitya Akademi, a state funded body, has had a dialogue with Comparative Literature, since its initial years. The paper will question if this can be seen within a greater framework where Comparative Literature complements the Nehruvian idea of nation building. The structure of universities in India has largely been influenced by the British system; however, even before the Independence, there had been a nationalist inclination towards finding an alternative way of institutional education. This paper will only focus on departments or institutions of literature and will try to understand how the method and practice of Comparative Literature might have been related to the idea of nationhood and in turn, a national literature. Around the 1950s, in several universities across India, clusters of departments were established under the name 'Modern Indian Languages'. This paper will enquire about the setting up of these clusters instead of independent single literature departments and also see if this idea of teaching literatures of different Indian languages separately, but with some sort of interaction, show any inclination towards the method that 'Comparative Indian Literature' subsequently follows.