

READING ACTIVITY

Intertextual Reading (comparing & contrasting for ongoing discourse)

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- Objective** : Facilitating readers to read a text in relation to other texts to form a web of textual relations, a network of texts to become critical readers
- Participation** : Individual
- Material** : Any text. Example - Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*
- Preparation** : While reading a text, constantly referring it to other texts of similar kind or totally contradictory to identify their proximities and differences.

Procedure :

- Start with a writer of your choice and one of his/her works. For instance, Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*, to be read after familiarizing oneself with her feminist leanings as reflected in her essay, *A Room of One's Own*. One of the dominant themes in *Mrs. Dalloway* is the condition of women in the patriarchal society.
- If one gets interested in the area of feminism and wishes to find out how this gets reflected in the Indian context, they could choose a writer such as Anita Nair and read some of her novels such as, *Ladies Coupe*, to identify the similarities and dissimilarities between these two novelists.
- One could figure out some of the similarities between the protagonists of these two novels: Woolf presents Clarissa Dalloway as the proverbial 'Angel in the house' playing the role of a perfect hostess in the party to be hosted in the evening. But the emphasis is on her private thoughts of her existential crises – she rebels against the wifely duties and rejects the male-dominated sexuality imposed on her and so on. Likewise, Akhila in *Ladies Coupe* is portrayed as a perfect daughter, sister, aunt and provider but she attempts to break free of these responsibilities and buys a one-way ticket to Kanyakumari to start a new life. Both the stories happen in a space of one day in *Mrs. Dalloway* and one night in *Ladies Coupe* and they follow the flashback technique.
- One should focus on dissimilarities as well, following the strategy of contrast. There are several differences between these two novels – although they thematically resemble, the socio-cultural contexts are quite variant. While Woolf situates the events and characters in the post-First World War England, Nair draws them from a conservative Brahmin family moored in totally Indian ethos and so on.
- Reading these two novels as a network of texts throws up innumerable opportunities to compare and contrast them in terms of content, form and style which sharpens readers' comprehension and their critical acumen.

Learning outcomes:

- 1) Learners recognize that the strategy of comparison and contrast is a significant means of acquiring new insights.
- 2) Learners realize that intertextuality promotes reading a text not as an independent entity but as an ongoing discourse process.

Further reading: Reading any text not in isolation but always in association with other texts which contain certain similarities and dissimilarities.

***Intertextual reading:** This concept is used in the sense of bringing texts together of the same writer or different writers who have similar concerns and styles. These texts are to be read in parallel, so as to identify the textual links and variations. This kind of reading strategy would increase the critical sensibility of readers.

Research in comparative literature often compares writers from different contexts belonging to different time period. For instance, several scholars have compared Shakespeare and Kamban/Ilango Adigal (two important Tamil writers or Margaret Atwood and Jane Austen and so on).