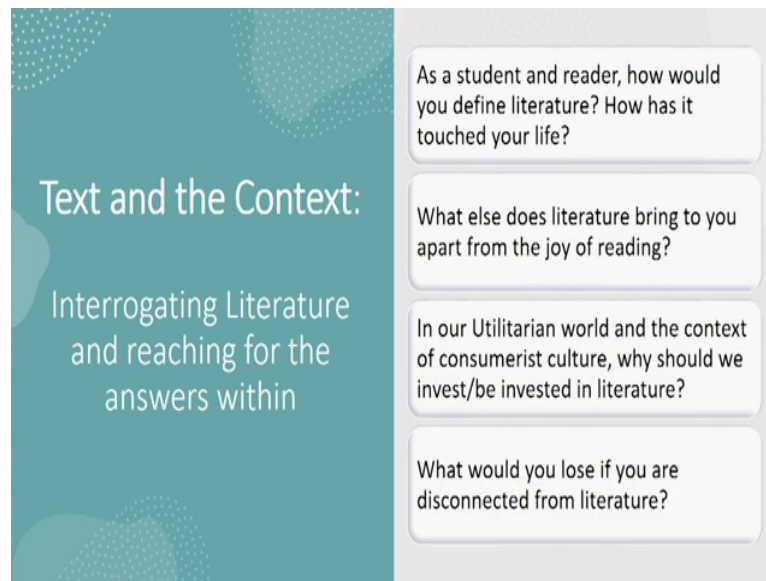


**Elements of Literature and Creative Communication**  
**Prof. H S Komalesha**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur**

**Lecture - 05**  
**Literature - Learner's Perspective**

Hi. Welcome back to the course Elements of Literature and Creative Communication. This is the 5th class or the last class of the first week. It has been a wonderful experience interacting with all of you. I am sure you reciprocate the sentiment. Here, during these four lectures, we have had some very interesting discussions on literature, its origin, and how it enhances our personality, our perspective towards life, and fosters interconnectedness. We have gone through some lovely and exciting fables and short stories. This class will be slightly different. In fact, for the first time, I am going to introduce a little more exciting feature than the short story. You might ask me what is more exciting than a short story. Well, you will wait and watch. We are going to introduce poetry; something remarkable something beautiful. And I am sure you will enjoy these lines of poems all the more or as well as you have enjoyed the short stories. So far, you have heard me speak on literature, different aspects of literature, different elements of literature, and interconnections that exist across texts. We have also learnt some interesting jargon like form, content, and intertextuality. Now, having heard me so extensively, well, a time has come where I must also listen to you. So, this class is all about how some of our learners, who have heard these lectures and wish to respond to the ideas of literature and their experiences of having read various literary pieces. Let us explore all these things. Are we ready to listen to some of our young learners interacting with us on literature and how it affects them? Let us go and see what they have got to say.

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Text and the Context:  
Interrogating Literature  
and reaching for the  
answers within

- As a student and reader, how would you define literature? How has it touched your life?
- What else does literature bring to you apart from the joy of reading?
- In our Utilitarian world and the context of consumerist culture, why should we invest/be invested in literature?
- What would you lose if you are disconnected from literature?

Here, before I ask the young learners to express their experiences with literature, I am going to ask some general questions concerning literature. You could pick any one of them and answer, or you want to club all these things and answer, that is up to you. I am going to raise some important questions, see how you wish to answer them. The first is as a student and a reader, of course, how would you define literature? What is your understanding of literature or do you wish to comment on how literature has touched your life? You are free to speak on that. Or you wish to speak on what has literature done to you apart from the joy of reading? Why else do you read literature? Why do you read literature apart from, of course, the obvious joy of reading, what are the other reasons? This is a very important question I had touched upon this in one of our earlier classes. We are living in a Utilitarian world where everything must have certain benefits. That is a sad state of affairs, nevertheless, it is true. So, in the context of the Utilitarian world in which we live, and the consumerist culture, what value does literature add to us, or why should we invest in literature, or why should we be invested in literature? Both have different shades of meaning. Why should we invest in literature, or why should we be invested in literature? See, if you can answer either of them or both of them depending on your convenience. And finally, what would you lose if you are disconnected from literature? Is there anything that you are going to lose at all? Is it going to depreciate something in your life? Please reflect on these questions and, as I said, you can either answer them individually or club all these questions and respond to the spirit of these questions. I leave that option to you. Now, is your time. I am really excited about this part,

because so far you have heard me and now, you give me the opportunity to listen to you. Therefore, it is really exciting. And what do I do? Of course, as any learner should do, when you are speaking, I will take down the notes so that I understand you correctly. I do not miss out on some important components of what you speak and based on what you have said, I will respond to that. I hope it is ok with you. You could now go ahead and speak on your understanding of literature Lakshmi, but before that, you may please introduce yourself and then start speaking on literature; how it touches you or what is your relationship with literature things like that ok yeah. It is your time now.

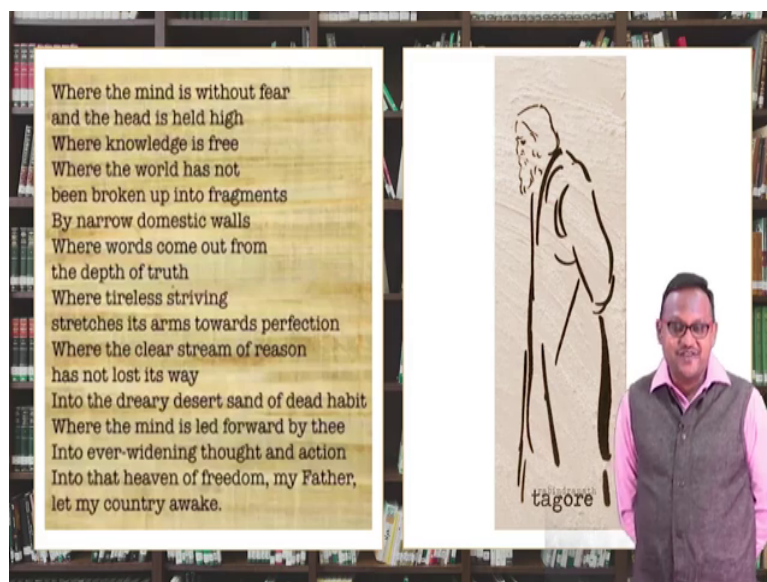
Hi. I am Lakshmi, a research student at the department of humanities and social sciences, IIT Kharagpur. As I recollect my initial trust with literature was through the lullaby sung to me by my mother, or through the bedtime stories that I was so fond of with all the folk songs and ballads that would create powerful visuals in my mind. Till my most recent engagements with literature, listening to Tom Bedlam's reading of Pablo Neruda's poetry in translation which is found from a YouTube repository and shared to me by my friend via WhatsApp. As I think about all these, I realize that literature is that which touches me. It moves me. It takes me beyond the narrow domestic walls as Rabindranath Tagore would put it and help me envision a better world. There is this beautiful phrase by Marianne Moore that I always remember. Imaginary gardens with real toads in them, literature is that for me. It is the bridge between what is there and what is possible by also being a significant value addition to life, something that makes life worth living. More importantly, literature is also that place where every one of us irrespective of who we are will be able to belong. Literature assures us that all of us matter. We are not alone. Thank you.

That is really brilliant Lakshmi. I am really impressed with how you began. She begins with the folk origins of literature which began as an oral medium, not as a written medium. So, gradually it became a written word, but earlier all our folk tales, remember all the grandmother's tales that we have heard, all the nursery rhymes, all of them have their origins in the oral medium.

So, she begins with the folk elements of literature and very brilliantly she talks about a few important lines by Rabindranath Tagore, in fact, I am going to touch upon that poem and later we can have a discussion of Tagore's poem. Then she begins with Marianne Moore's interesting poem. In fact, the poem is called Poetry. The title of the poem is Poetry where she talks of poetry's ability to forge an alliance with reality because poetry is imaginative. The

power of imagination to connect with reality and alter reality for the better; is a remarkable invocation of Marianne Moore. How literature also acts as a bridge between the world of imagination and reality; these are some important concepts. But at the core, the objective of literature if at all it has any objective, is to make us a universal being. Else we are just confined to narrow fragments and within those confines, we get complacent. So, the true purpose of literature is to make us universal beings, to take us out of those narrow confines that limit our understanding, limit our perception, limit our imagination, and make us truly *Vishwa Manawa* - the universal being. And of course, it is in this context we can also recall what the French writer Albert Camus said, ‘the purpose of literature is to take us on to a journey from being to becoming’; The movement of a being from being to becoming. It entails a journey, just how literature entails a journey.

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Lakshmi has given us an extraordinary opportunity to revisit one of the brightest and iconoclastic poems by Rabindranath Tagore; Where the Mind is Without Fear. We have heard of every nation having its own anthem; these are called national anthems right. Of course, Tagore himself has authored national anthems for two countries; Probably the only poet who has had a distinct honour of having written anthems national anthems for two different countries. If there is one anthem or if there could be one anthem that is for the entire globe, we can call it a global anthem. This poem qualifies to be the best candidate for that; Where the mind is without fear. Let me read this out. Of course, these lines are quite evident and they are highly charged. Every time you read those lines they wake you up from all the

slumbers that have inhabited that have created shackles that have put us in shackles that have that are capable of freeing us from all the chains. Let us read these immortal lines.

Where the mind is without fear  
and the head is held high  
where knowledge is free  
where the world has not been broken  
up into fragments by narrow domestic walls  
where words come out from the  
depth of truth  
where tireless driving stretches its arms towards perfection  
where the clear stream of reason  
has not lost its way into the  
dreary desert where the clear stream of reason  
has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand of dead habit  
where the mind is led forward  
by thee into ever-widening  
thought and action  
into that heaven of freedom,  
my father,  
let my country awake.

This can be the anthem for the entire humanity. A remarkable and soulful prayer. I just wish if there are powers above let them bless the entire humanity so that not just the countrymen that Tagore wishes, the entire people of the whole globe wake up in that kind of country in that kind of place. Now, let us listen to some other learners. She too is eager to make her points on literature and what literature has done to her equations, her chemistry, with literature. Let us go and listen to Bidisha; another bright and promising young research scholar of IIT, Kharagpur. Whatever she has got to say it would be equally rewarding I hope, and I will also take down what she says so that we can have an interesting discussion on that.

Hi. I am Bidisha, a PhD student at the department of humanities and social sciences, IIT Kharagpur. Literature for me is a place where I come to find language at its most beautiful, thoughtful, and ingenious. It is where I come to take rest from the mundane rhythm of life and yet in the act, I come closer to life. I get so much more than a greater sensibility for language from literature. It allows me to exercise my emotional and rational apparatus in a simulated environment. Therefore, although the experiences feel vivid, it is a safe space. Literature allows me to feel more attuned to people around me because in the act of reading I am eager to put myself in others' shoes and I feel more receptive. There is a great potential for neural revision. There is a great possibility for a change of learned behavioural patterns and thought patterns. In that sense, literature is no less than a form of help. Literature helps me to look at something from multiple perspectives; beyond the binary shapes of black and white. Literature helps me to read something critical. It helps me to look at something critically, whether it is a written or spoken discourse. Literature helps me to read between the lines and also against the grain, but even more than all of this, literature offers me support and comfort when I do not get that from people in my immediate surroundings. Because something might be contrary to their value system. Therefore, it will not be an exaggeration to say that literature is my alter family. Thank you.

That is really brilliant. I enjoyed listening to you Bidisha. Let us have a discussion on what she says because she raises very many important points and for all our benefit, I have just jotted it down. When she says language at its most delicate and ingenious what she is referring to probably if I understand her correctly is that literature, for language, acts like the *Manasa Gangotri*. For what *Manasa Gangotri* is for the river Ganga, literature is for the river called language, because there it is pristine, at its best the origin. And she highlights the transformative ability of literature, the ability of literature to touch and change from within. More than a transformation it is a kind of metamorphosis. Transformation taken to a level of perfection change taken to the level of perfection, metamorphosis is that. So, literature has the ability to transform us from within so that we become evolved beings refined creatures an extraordinary thing. And in the process, she talks about very interesting things. She says that literature has the potential to create alter-families. Like you have alter-egos, alter personalities, it has the capacity to create alter families, is not it? Because when you read a work of art or when you watch a movie, as long as you are doing that you become a part of that family. That is why you will have seen many people crying when they are watching a sorrowful scene or when they are laughing. Why does it happen? Because it automatically

creates networks, networks between what you are and what you see there with what you have or what you are. So, she talks about the potential of literature to create alter families. I have some interesting poems, I have some interesting lines that almost echo what Bidisha says. Let us look at these lines and discuss them in a little more detailed manner, right.

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**The Guest House**

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
as an unexpected visitor.  
Welcome and entertain them all!

Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still, treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.  
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

Parents are like a bow, And children like  
arrows. The more the bow bends and  
stretches, farther the arrow flies.  
I fly, not because I am special, but  
because they stretched for me.  
-Khalil Gibran

Love calls -  
everywhere and always.  
We're sky bound.  
Are you coming?  
Rumi

In order to just emphasize or emphasize what they have said or illustrate, to put it differently, to illustrate what they said, I have taken up a couple of poems. Let us say for instance these poems have the potential to enhance empathy, because you have heard one or two of our speakers developing on the concept of empathy. And how there was a speaker who talked of how literature can create alter reality like alter realities alter families. There was another learner who highlighted how literature can act as an antidote to harsh reality. So, these poems here reflect those sentiments they illustrate those sentiments in a more poetic and aesthetic manner; that is why let me discuss these poems with you. Here is a brilliant poem by Rumi called The Guest House, it is oft-quoted and often recited.

Please pay attention to this. As I said if you do not get it in the single reading no problem, but you can read it again and then you will be able to get it, but the context is simple. Look at this human being, look at the human being as a kind of a guest house. Now, the comparison is similar. A human being is compared to the guest house. Now, the rest of the poem becomes

evident to you. Why is the poet calling human being or comparing human being to a guest house? What are the similarities? What are the differences, let us continue reading the poem?

“This being human is a guesthouse.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,

some momentary awareness comes

as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all.”

Like guests enter the guest room the guest house, welcome all of them. They are just like guests to us. What are the guests? Joy, Depression, Meanness. Whatever comes to our life whatever moment fleeting emotions whatever they are joy, be it sorrow, treat them just like guests. Because like guests leave after a couple of days, they too leave. Once we realize this profound truth, then our understanding of joy our understanding of sorrow changes and our response to these things also change. Therefore, treat them like a guest because they are going to leave after having completed their stay, they leave.

“Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,

who violently sweep your house

empty of its furniture,

still, treat each guest honorably.

He may be clearing you out

for some new delight,

meet them at the door laughing,

and invite them in. Just invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,

because each has been sent

as a guide from beyond. “



What an extraordinary poem! If we have understood the spirit behind this poem, our entire perspective towards life, relationships, our responses to sorrows, our responses to joys, it changes. If we can consider the hardship that comes our way, we can treat this hardship also as a guest. Treat suffering as a calling card from God. It is like a visitation. If suffering has visited you, if hardship has come by you, then it means it is a sure shot that you have received a visiting card by God; God is about to visit you very shortly; such a soothing idea. If we can get hold of these lines at our weakest moments, at our most depressive moments then, probably the way we respond to these negative emotions, dark emotions changes. These lines can be companions for life. Now, look at another short interesting poem by Khalil Gibran, who is a Lebanese American poet. These are taken from his collection of poems called 'The Prophet'. It is one of the most sold-out books, one of the most popular widely-read poetry books.

“ Parents are like a bow, and children like  
arrows. The more the bow bends and  
stretches, the farther the arrow flies.  
I fly, not because I am special, but  
because they stretched for me. “

We can understand this in a different context. Again, when there is a hardship that comes by or when we are not happy, when we are suffering, when there is pain; it is like it is bending us. So, when we feel that there is a lot of pressure on us, let us remember that the more pressure you create on the bow, the farther the arrow goes alright. So, probably the pressure that we have right now, we may feel it is unbearable. But remember, the more such pressures are there in our life, the more we fly quite far ahead. Maybe, they have come here for a purpose to push us to propel us towards nobler goals or higher goals. So, if you can treat these problems in this light in the light that they are here to push us to get the better out of us, probably we do not suffer so much our suffering lessens to a certain extent. I have Emon here with me who is bubbling with energy and enthusiasm to share his connections his equations with literature. Let us listen to him. Probably let us listen to other young learners and let us listen to what they have got to say. Probably after listening to all of them, we can jot down

the important points they say and then have a discussion a comprehensive discussion on what they say. Yeah. Emon please go ahead. We are ready for you. And Emon is again a bright and dedicated research student in the department of humanities and social sciences. I am equally enthusiastic to listen to him. Let us go and listen to what he has got to say.

Hello everyone. My name is Emon and I am a research scholar at the department of humanities and social sciences at IIT Kharagpur. Literature for me has played an extremely crucial and profoundly transformative role in turning me into the person that I have become today. It has made me far more empathetic. It has made me a far more confident person and most importantly it has taught me to look at and consider multiple perspectives when dealing with certain situations. Literature extraordinarily opens this door to a different dimension altogether through which we can experience a wide range of emotions and feelings and amazing literary characters. And without these extraordinary experiences through literature, our life would be dimensional and it would be restricted to the narrow confines of our domestic life, of the chance circumstances of our birth. Reading literature forces us to think beyond these narrow confines, think beyond our domestic worlds. It forces us to go beyond our comfort zone, to think about people with different circumstances of life. It forces us to experience beyond our comfort zone that is and due and thanks to all these experiences we are far more empathetic, it teaches us empathy and most importantly literature validates your feelings. It shows us that all the crises that we face all the problems that we have our feelings, our emotions although they are unique at the same time are experienced by people across centuries, across continents, across cultures. And this validation is something that I feel is very crucial to me and very crucial to whoever reads and appreciates literature and for that, I will be extremely I would be I will always be extremely grateful to literature and the impact that it has had on my life. Thank you.

That is brilliant. I really enjoyed listening to you. In a span of a couple of minutes that he speaks he uses the word empathy. If you have noticed he invokes the word empathy at least four to five times; that is a very important component and that is an important achievement of literature, because it creates that element of empathy or if it enhances that component of empathy in all of us. I am really glad to see some of these young learners almost echoing some of the similar sentiments that we have discussed in the previous classes. And coming back to empathy. Empathy is a real game-changer, especially in the contemporary world. Let us remember what Gandhi says: an eye for an eye where would it leave us. It would leave us

in a world full of blind people or bruised people or hurt people. So, literature has the capacity to create empathetic people; that is the antidote to the world that is conflict ridden. The world that we live in is conflict-ridden; be it at the national levels or at the regional levels or even at the individual levels conflicts is what marks our lives. So, in order to overcome that probably empathy is what we require; that is the reason why he aptly highlights the empathy creating value of literature and he also discusses how literature almost kicks us out of our comfort zones, because when we are in comfort zones; that makes us lazy and unproductive; that makes us take things for granted right. When literature unsettles us, it unsettles us, because it makes us take stock of new things. It offers us new lenses through which we can look at the world alright. So, it offers us new perspectives that is why he also talks about literature offering new perspectives and more than that, it validates our feelings. Because when you are in the company of characters that freely express what they feel what happens is; it validates our own emotions because remember we are emotional beings. Human beings are emotional beings. Of course, we are also reason-oriented beings, but more than reason what appeals to us is our emotions, our feelings. So, literature acts as a kind of validation of all those feelings. So, that is something very remarkable. Of course, later after listening to another enthusiastic participant, we are going to discuss some of these concepts in the context of some brilliant lines by renowned poets such as Rumi, Khalil Gibran and others. Let us go and listen to what other learners have got to speak. We have Rifat here with us. She is an avid reader. She likes poetry. Let us go and listen to why she reads poetry or why she connects with literature, what is the gain, what is the loss. Let us go and listen to her alright. Yeah. Rifat again, while you are speaking, I will be taking down the notes and later I will be discussing some of your important concepts some of the concepts that you share with me with my other learners alright yeah. Please go ahead.

Hello. I am Rifat, a research scholar at the department of humanities and social sciences, IIT Kharagpur. The oft-quoted meaning of literature is anything that is written. However, literature is more than that. Given that the earliest instances of literature were not scripted, but existing orally speaks for itself. The meaning and definition of literature has changed and is still changing with the ages. There can be no one definition of literature since it is subjective. Personally, literature is a place of sojourn and escape from reality yet much more than that. Because literature also familiarizes us with the harshest realities which are not otherwise presented before us. Literature employs the power and art of language in order to put forward a plethora of human emotions and experiences in the finest manner; that it sways

us, it moves us. It helps us step into the shoes of different characters and lead a thousand lives. Poetry presents the trees, the azure sky, birds and other elements of nature in an aesthetic, repossessing and arresting manner; that we fall in love with nature all over again and it also revitalizes our soul. It makes us value things. In times of distress and despair, it gives us hope and a reason to believe and smile. However, it does not only create a cocoon and keeps us away from the realities or the unpleasant realities and as it acquires us with the unnerving narratives or the concomitant issues. Apart from these, who can deny the blessings and power of literature. The highly charged lines that Kazi Nazrul Islam wrote poem Kandari Hushiar.

*The impassable mountains boundless deserts,  
monstrous oceans must pass through the dark night.  
Travellers be aware the boat trembles the water swells.  
The boatman loses his way, the cell is torn who will take hold?  
Who has the courage? Awake o' youth the future Beckons  
the paroxysmal storms must be overcome  
and they both must be taken ashore.*

These lines added much to the needed zeal and vigour of the Bengali's during the national uprising and countless other literary works have done the same. It makes us realize our rights. It makes us understand ourselves as well as others better, better. It makes us empathize with people. Literature brings out the best version of ourselves and makes us better human beings. Thank you.

What a brilliant and charged rendition of the Poet Laureate of Bangla! Kazi Nazrul Islam's Poetry always has the capacity to add life to the deadlines, because only when you recite a poem, will it come out alive. So, she has really brought the poem out alive; that is a remarkable thing. Thank you, Rifat. She begins with the oral origins of literature like some of our other learners have already pointed out. More than this it is a she says it is a place of sojourn it is a place of escape. Remember most of the time when reality becomes harsh. We use the term biting reality right. When reality becomes dark and harsh and biting, then we need a place to escape. We need a place to escape so that we can come back. It is not an

escapist method. What I am saying is you need a place, a place of peace, solitude. So, literature provides that place of a sojourn, a kind of a stay, a temporary stay and it acts as an antidote to the harsh realities of this world. More than that she talks about literature's ability to connect us with nature because, like literature or more than literature, nature has the ability to nurture our soul in extraordinary ways. Please remember it is only recently that we have disconnected ourselves from nature and it is a great loss. We do not even realize the extent to which the extent of damage it has done. Only when we learn to reconnect with nature that we really gain something meaningful because nature has always acted as an anchor to our existence anchored to our self ok. So, she talks about the literature's ability to connect us back with nature and how that revitalizes us. Writers can be called engineers of the soul, why? Because they can shape it to the extent they want or in the way they want it they are called the engineers of our soul. And literature has the ability to create some sort of 'surgical interventions' in our life, we are taking this phrase out of the context and using it for literature and poetry. Literature has the capacity for this kind of surgical intervention in our lives and transforming us for the better. We are going to take up all these things in the context of some brilliant lines by some remarkable poets. Let us go through them. Let us go through these lines and of course, we can hear certain echoes of certain voices, of course, we discussed intertextuality. See if you can listen to certain other literary voices speaking through these lines.

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Some more lovely lines. In fact, these lines are just arranged in some random order, it is an interesting construct - a random order. Look at this poem.

“Trees are poems the earth  
writes upon the sky. We fell  
them down and turned them  
into paper that we may  
record our emptiness.”

The poem simultaneously talks of how nature is a kind of a song that the earth has sung for itself and how by destroying nature how we are creating emptiness. When we make these poems when we popularize these poems probably, it creates a kind of awareness about these problems of deforestation, the problem of insensitivity towards nature, we can cure our society of these maladies when we popularize these lines.

“The earth delights  
to feel your bare feet  
and the winds long  
to play with your hair.”

Here is another very short poem that talks of how nature is eager to be with us, the companionship that nature wants to foster with us. Most of our poets realize this, most of the sensible beings realize what kind of an anchor nature provides in life; that is the reason why we need to take care of nature not to preserve nature for the sake of nature, but to preserve it for our sake because the benefits are not just in terms of its economic benefits. These are not just fiscal benefits. The benefits are immense. So, these are some things that we can keep in mind. And since I have mentioned these poets be it Rumi, Khalil Gibran (Refer Time: 45:12) or even Bhagavad-Gita; these poems or these literary pieces have an extraordinary ability to inspire us. So, if possible, let us pick up any of these books and read at least a few pages; that is not an impossible task right. I do not think I am asking too much of you. If I ask you to read at least a couple of pages of any of these poets that you like.

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Now, before we leave, let us quickly do a kind of a recap, recapitulate what we did this entire week. We began the entire first-week lectures in a unique way, the strings of lectures were more introductory in nature. More than that we tried locating literature in our lives, and our lives in literature; it is both. I mean both are correct. We located literature in our lives we also located ourselves in literature. So, the first lecture was more of an introduction. We began with a short story and then, we introduced literature, we briefly defined it. We continued that discussion in the next class and along with defining literature in some remarkable lines, we also understood the relevance of literature, how literature is relevant in our lives and in our society. And in the third class we went on to discuss the multi-dimensional benefits of engaging with literature and all this we did taking a couple of interesting parables, fables, folk tales, short stories. And in the fourth class, we discussed how to engage with literature. Is there any systematic way to engage with literature and how do we appreciate literature? Because to read it like a layperson is one thing, of course, it has its own benefits. But in the process, we learnt how to hone our skills in reading literature so that we can optimize our exposure to literature and the benefits of literature. And in the last class, of course, we listened to literature from the perspective of our young learners. I am sure all these discussions will have helped you understand your own equations with literature and with these things we are ending the first week. The next week we begin with a new topic. Until then, bye. See you in the next class, next week.