

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

Lecture - 51
Aristotle and the Dramatic Art

Hello, we are in the 11th week of our course Elements of Literature and Creative Communication. Two more weeks for the completion of the course, and if you just look back at the range of subjects we have covered and the range of topics we have discussed, learnt, debated, you would be quite surprised.

In a course that spans 12 weeks, we have covered a wide gamut of topics. So, if you have sincerely attended all the classes and you have participated in the assignments and all that, you can proudly say that you have learnt quite many things in literature.

And more than that please remember, we have highlighted this right in the very beginning, literature is more about developing sensibility. In fact, it is more than knowledge production, it is about how to respond to the society around. Therefore, automatically our sensory organs will have increased their potential, if not literally at least metaphorically.

Our sensibilities will have grown by leaps and bounds and our sensitivity quotient to respond to society around will have automatically attuned to its best capabilities. Last week we discussed a drama. In fact, we introduced drama, discussed it in detail, in terms of structures, elements, techniques, usual types and all that.

So, in this week we are beginning with Aristotle and the Dramatic Art. In other words, this week would focus on discussing Western drama, especially in terms of its origin and various theories concerning Western drama. So, we are beginning this week with a discussion of Aristotle.

Because every student of literature who has had some exposure to Western theatre in general and the concept of tragedy in particular would know, Aristotle is an invariable and you cannot do away with Aristotle when it comes to discussing drama. You can do away with anybody but Aristotle because the Western tradition of drama that we have now, which has an history of about 2500 years, has its foundations in Aristotle's contribution. Especially in its

theoretical foundations you find Aristotle's contribution to a very significant extent. That is the reason why we have to begin our discussion of the theory of tragedy, theory of drama, theory of theatre and all that with Aristotle.

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Aristotle: Genius of Greece

- Pillars of Western Philosophy: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle
- Physics, biology, zoology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, poetry, theatre, music, rhetoric, psychology, linguistics, economics, politics, meteorology, geology and government... a synthesis of various philosophies
- Author of 200 books on Natural Science, Philosophy. Logic and Ethics, Metaphysics...; 30 have survived
- Lyceum -- Aristotle's Peripatetic school of philosophy; Aristotle (the best purpose)
- "the master of those who know" - Dante

(384 - 322 BC)

The slide includes a circular portrait of Aristotle in the top right and a small video inset in the bottom right showing a man with glasses speaking. There are also decorative elements like a plant on the left and a potted plant on the right.

Aristotle is somebody that you might have heard in various context. In fact, for the uninitiated, Aristotle happens to be the teacher of the Alexander the Great. At least in that context we would have heard Aristotle's name. He was the teacher of the Great Alexander who conquered many parts of the world and all that.

But Aristotle's significance especially in the Western intellectual traditions, Western epistemological traditions is remarkable. In fact, it is much more than what we can fathom in our limited understandings because Aristotle was, in the true sense of the term, versatile. He was in the true sense of the term a versatile or a multifaceted genius.

Because, today various branches of natural sciences, different branches of philosophical sciences consider Aristotle as the founding figure. In fact, many of them even go to the extent of calling him as the 'father of physics', 'father of biology'. You heard me right! His contribution to physics, biology, the list of subjects that I mention in the second point, they are not random subjects. He had a mastery over all of them. Not familiarity, but mastery over all of them because he has authored foundational works in these areas: zoology, metaphysics, logic, ethics, aesthetics, poetry, theatre, music, rhetoric, linguistics economics, meteorology, geology, psychology now look at this including government and administration.

He was a polymath. He was in the true sense of the term 'the Master'. In fact, the Middle Eastern cultures consider him as the first teacher, what we call in the Indian context 'Adi Guru'. Aristotle is in the Western context, especially in the Middle Eastern context, the first teacher considering his contribution to all these different branches of knowledge.

Dante, a 14th century Italian poet, of course, Dante in the context of *The Divine Comedy* – in fact, divine comedy is one of the invaluable pieces of literature written during the Middle Ages – 14th century Italian poet Dante considers Aristotle as the master of those who know, like the master of the master.

That is the reason why he is a part of the great philosophical tradition. Western philosophy begins with an active discussion of Socrates and from Socrates you have Plato, who is a direct pupil of Socrates and Aristotle is a direct pupil of Plato. Therefore, they are called the triumvirate, the *Trimurti* of Western philosophy.

So they are the ones who prepare the ground for Western philosophy to flourish and Aristotle was such kind of a genius that in his works you find a complex synthesis of a various epistemes, various schools of philosophies as such, and historians have attributed more than 200 books in natural sciences, philosophy, logic, ethics, metaphysics.

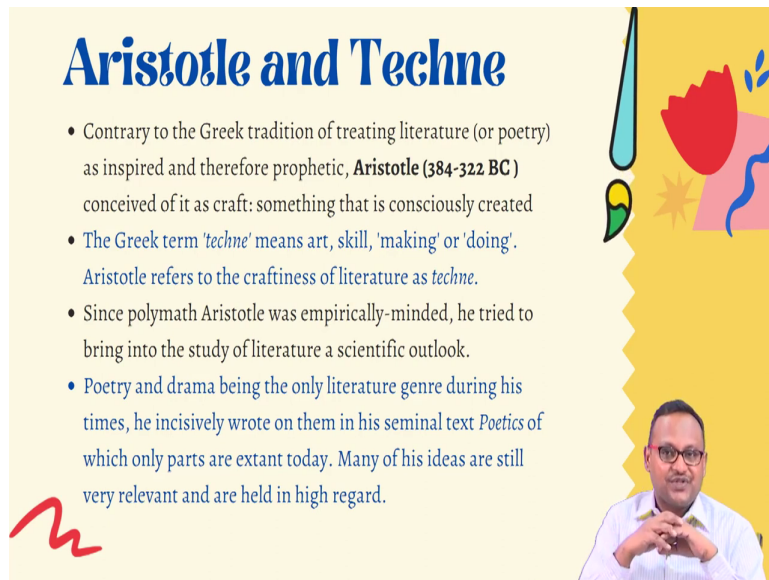
Unfortunately, so far 30 of his works have survived. That is all, whereas we find references to his works in some of them or in some of the works written by his peers and his students and all that. Now imagine what kind of a scholar this guy must be.

And here what I have is a 11th century painting of Aristotle, an oil painting, 11th century painting of Aristotle, a great guy! And why do we discuss such a genius in our class on drama and theatre? Because our very first theoretical work on western drama begins with him. It is called *Poetics*.

Now, remember when Aristotle was writing there was not much of a distinction between poetry and drama, because most part of the drama was filled with poetry. Therefore, his observations hold good for poetry as well, but it is a distinct theoretical book that deals with theories of tragedy, comedy, the very nature of art in general and all that. *Poetics*: that is the word, that is the reason why we discuss Aristotle and invoke his presence. So, if you are really interested to know you can please take a look at Aristotle's works and contributions in various areas.

Especially, today his works are invaluable in the study of logic. Especially, in the study of ethics, the contemporary corporate world makes use of *Nicomachean Ethics* that is his remarkable work. So, you can take a look at some of his works.

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Aristotle and Techne

- Contrary to the Greek tradition of treating literature (or poetry) as inspired and therefore prophetic, **Aristotle (384-322 BC)** conceived of it as craft: something that is consciously created
- The Greek term '*techne*' means art, skill, 'making' or 'doing'. Aristotle refers to the craftiness of literature as *techne*.
- Since polymath Aristotle was empirically-minded, he tried to bring into the study of literature a scientific outlook.
- Poetry and drama being the only literature genre during his times, he incisively wrote on them in his seminal text *Poetics* of which only parts are extant today. Many of his ideas are still very relevant and are held in high regard.

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Now, the distinct contribution of Aristotle is in the contribution in his different concept of treating literature or poetry or as drama because until that point of time people looked at drama or theatre or performing arts from a kind of spiritual ground. It was a part of religious background. Like poetry, drama too has its background in various religious rituals. Maybe in the subsequent classes while discussing origins of drama we can touch upon that.

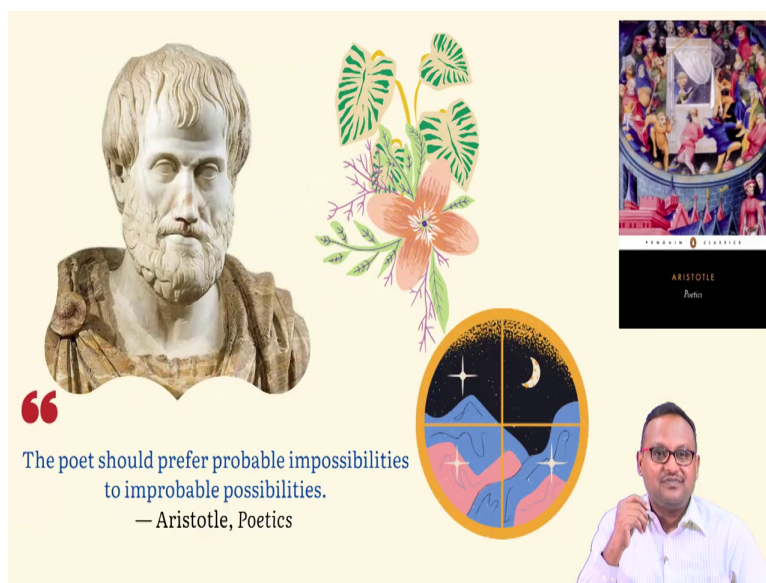
Whereas, for the first time he recalibrated the lens of drama and performing arts and considered it from a scientific approach. In fact, look at the term 'techne'. You and I keep using word like technology very frequently, right? And we use it as a kind of a polar opposite of arts and performing arts, but you would be surprised to know that technology has a combination of roots 'techne' and 'logy'. 'Techne' means actually art, it means skill. Therefore, technology traditionally should be a systematic study of art or skill.

But today technology means something drastically opposite. So, 'techne' in that sense has the connotation of making or doing also. That is why technology in that sense, it has many meanings.

He was a natural scientist. In fact, he also has some significant discussion on dentistry as well. Of course, his theory was later disproved, another matter, but he had some contributions in dentistry too. So, he had a scientific approach. Therefore, he looked at even plays, drama from that particular approach.

Therefore, while his predecessors such as Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes (they were his predecessors) were busy making plays, he studied the structures underlying the drama. So, in that sense we have the first structuralist in him. We study structuralism in the 1950-60s whereas we find the first structuralist in Aristotle because he studied the underlying structure behind an artistic enterprise called drama and came out with various elements constituting drama, various types of drama, and what is significant in drama. So, very thorough and a systematic approach. That is the reason why we begin with Aristotle and especially his important work called *Poetics*.

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Now, we have several translations of this particular work available. Penguin Classics is one of the most popular ones. If you are interested in reading *Poetics* out of curiosity, at least a couple of pages, you can take a look at the Penguin Classics.

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Six Elements of Drama

Aristotle identified six core elements of drama and their order of importance. The six elements in that order are:

- Plot
- Character
- Theme/Thought
- Dialogue/Diction
- Music
- Spectacle

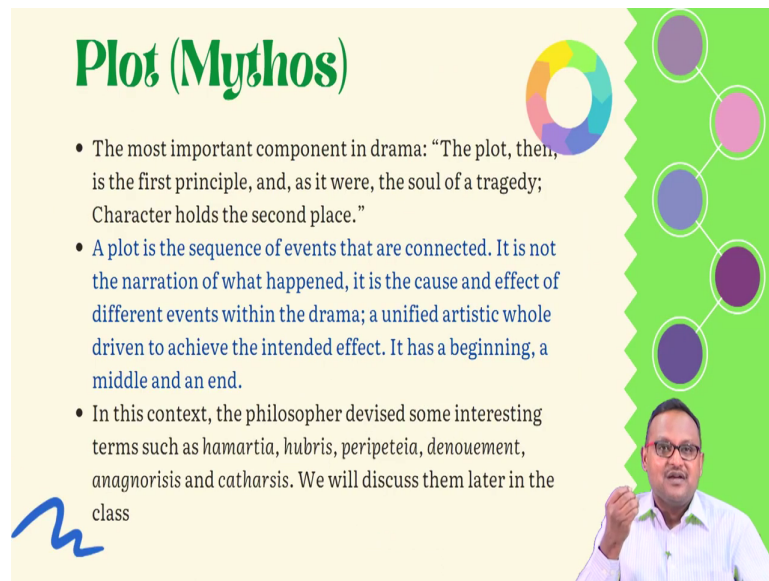
Let's look at each of these elements now

Now, according to Aristotle whether it is this particular observation, is relevant to the Greek drama that was played until his time, but his influence and the influence of Greek drama spread much beyond the classical Hellenistic age. In fact, until let us say the Elizabethan period because Elizabethan period developed its own distinct dramatic sensibility, but that too has its foundations or it borrows some of its features from this Greek tradition of drama and that is the reason why these elements of drama almost hold good even to this day. Even to this day, any student of drama, any student of the theatre will have to necessarily go through Aristotle's elements of drama.

So, according to him either a tragedy or a comedy or any drama should have 6 distinct elements. We must have discussed this in the very beginning of the classes in a very tangential way. So, today we are going to discuss it in a little more detailed manner. So, plot, character, theme (remember it is a translation from the Greek therefore, a couple of translators call it 'theme' and some someone else might as well call it 'thought'.)

Similarly, for dialogue and diction. Then you have music or it can also be called song, then you have spectacle. These are different elements of drama. And to a certain extent the order in which it is written is also significant because for Aristotle plot occupied a primary position of significance in drama. So, therefore, let us study that in a systematic way.

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Plot (Mythos)

- The most important component in drama: “The plot, then, is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; Character holds the second place.”
- A plot is the sequence of events that are connected. It is not the narration of what happened, it is the cause and effect of different events within the drama; a unified artistic whole driven to achieve the intended effect. It has a beginning, a middle and an end.
- In this context, the philosopher devised some interesting terms such as *hamartia*, *hubris*, *peripeteia*, *denouement*, *anagnorisis* and *catharsis*. We will discuss them later in the class

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The word in Greek for plot is ‘mythos’. ‘Mythos’: the same root word for mythology. According to Aristotle, plot occupied the crown of glory in a drama. If anything occupied a crown of glory then it’s automatically plot because he seemed to have said that the plot is the first principle as it were the soul of a tragedy.

It’s true character is important, but it holds a secondary position and of course, that is why after plot you have character. Therefore, he considers plot the soul of tragedy. When he said tragedy of course, all dramatic because until that point of time, tragedy was a predominant type of drama. Comedy was a later invention. We identified that, right?

Because, at least for a first couple of hundred years, tragedy was the only drama that was getting played. And later of course, with Aristophanes comedy was introduced. We are going to discuss that in the subsequent classes. Now, for him plot is very important because, as we discussed in the class on fiction, plot is a sequence of events that are connected.

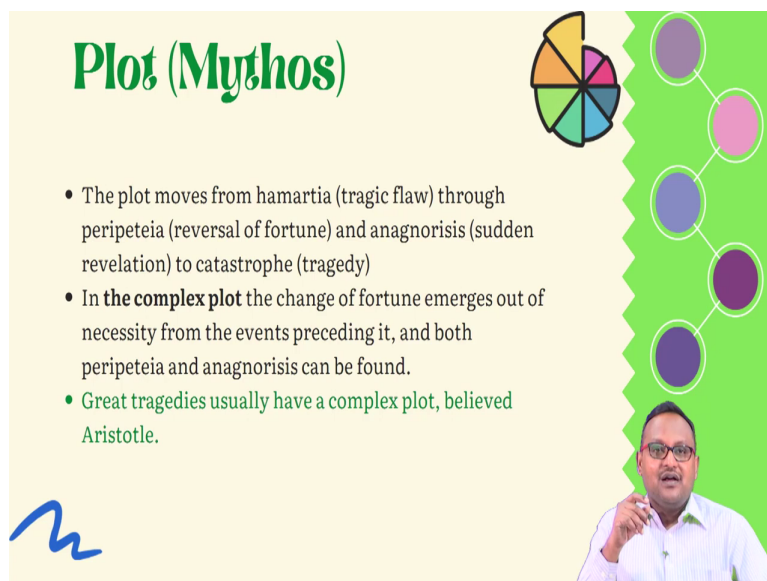
So, not just in terms of chronological events, but also in terms of cause and effect: why did something happen, what are the reasons behind this and why did this happen and what is the result of this, like this cause and effect. So, plot is related to that. A sequence of events and they are interconnected and in fact, it is like an engine that propels a motor vehicle.

So, you can metaphorically say it is the engine that pushes the vehicle ahead. So, if drama is a vehicle, then plot is its engine. Therefore, he said that a plot should have a unified whole. In fact, a plot is often subdivided in Act 1, Act 2, Act 3. So, they are interconnected.

You cannot have some random acts inserted together. So, there must be a kind of a unity. He later used the word 'unity of action'. We are going to discuss it in the subsequent slides, but a plot should have a unified artistic component driven to achieve a desired effect because if the playwright intends certain effect to be created on the audience, your plot should aid you in that. That is why it should have a neat beginning, a middle, and an end. Of course, later based on the ideas proposed by Aristotle, Freytag develops it as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, denouement. So, Aristotle's influence can be found there.

So, in this book he makes use of certain very important concepts called 'hamartia', 'hubris', 'peripeteia', 'denouement', 'anagnorisis', 'catharsis'. These are the various technical terms. Let us take a quick look at them.

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Plot (Mythos)

- The plot moves from hamartia (tragic flaw) through peripeteia (reversal of fortune) and anagnorisis (sudden revelation) to catastrophe (tragedy)
- In **the complex plot** the change of fortune emerges out of necessity from the events preceding it, and both peripeteia and anagnorisis can be found.
- Great tragedies usually have a complex plot, believed Aristotle.

The slide features a diagram of a wheel with eight colored segments (yellow, orange, red, pink, purple, blue, green, and light blue) and a vertical sequence of five circles (purple, pink, blue, purple, and purple) connected by lines. A small image of a man speaking is visible in the bottom right corner.

He says that the plot has to move through some of these features. In fact, 'hamartia', that is a Greek word for tragic flaw because in a character, especially in a tragic character, there must be something wrong. That is why whatever the character does, they do not succeed in that. Either a fatalistic error or a tragic flaw in the in them. So, that is hamartia.

So, the plot moves from that tragic flaw through 'peripeteia'. Because of the flaw things that were going smoothly, there is a kind of a sudden reversal and things begin going sore. They are not happening properly. There is a sudden reversal. That reversal of fortune can be called peripeteia. That is the term he uses for that.

And then because of this the character undergoes an introspection mode: why is this happening to me, what might be the reason. So, then the character realizes something must be wrong with them. That is called a recognition, a proper recognition, a revelation or a recognition.

They realize the reason behind it; however, it is too late by the time they realize the reason behind. it is too late and it results in tragedy and that is when catastrophe takes place. It leads to 'catharsis'. So, that is something that he uses.

And Aristotle believed that there are two types of plots. One is a simple plot which need not go through all these movements. The other is of course, a complex plot and he believed that an ideal tragedy in its full glory should necessarily have a complex plot. So, this is his understanding of plot. A plot should have a neat beginning, middle, and an end, and all the five elements.

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Character (Ethos)

- A tragic hero who is always a noble man who in turn is neither thoroughly good nor thoroughly bad but a heady mixture of both
- "Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids." Aristotle in *Poetics*
- In Aristotelian terms, character is less significant than plot. Why?
- "Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions — what we do — that we are happy or the reverse..." "In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action"



Now, let us go to see the second element: character. In Greek it's called 'ethos'. In a pedestal character occupies the second position. So, when we say character, generally it refers to the protagonist here, not so much about the other characters.

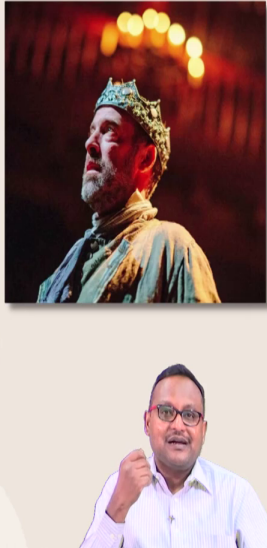
So, he says that character is that which reveals moral purpose because it is through the character that the action takes place. Therefore, he says that character is that which reveals moral purpose showing what kind of things happen here, whether a person chooses it or avoids it and things like that. Well, we have already identified Aristotle giving primacy to plot over character.

Why does he do that? He says that character might give us quality in terms of characteristic traits, it may help us realize the qualities of an individual's humanity whereas whether we are happy or unhappy is decided based on what we do. Therefore, what we do happens because of the plot, right? So, that was his understanding. It is true that of course, there are a lot of complications to that. You can theoretically disagree with him because based on what you do, your character also develops, because you cannot distinguish your character from the characteristic trait and what you do. You cannot distinguish like that, but for Aristotle that was an important distinction. Therefore, he prioritized plot over character.

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Character (Ethos)

- The types of character found in drama (e.g. round and flat character, protagonist - antagonist etc.) are analogous to characters in fiction
- Aristotle believed a tragic hero should not be so exalted and perfect that the audience cannot relate to their persona and therefore their suffering.
- But s/he should be superior in most aspects to the average human being so as to avoid rousing the feeling of contempt or justification in the audience's mind.
- A fall of such a character can then rouse intended emotions of pity and fear in the audience.

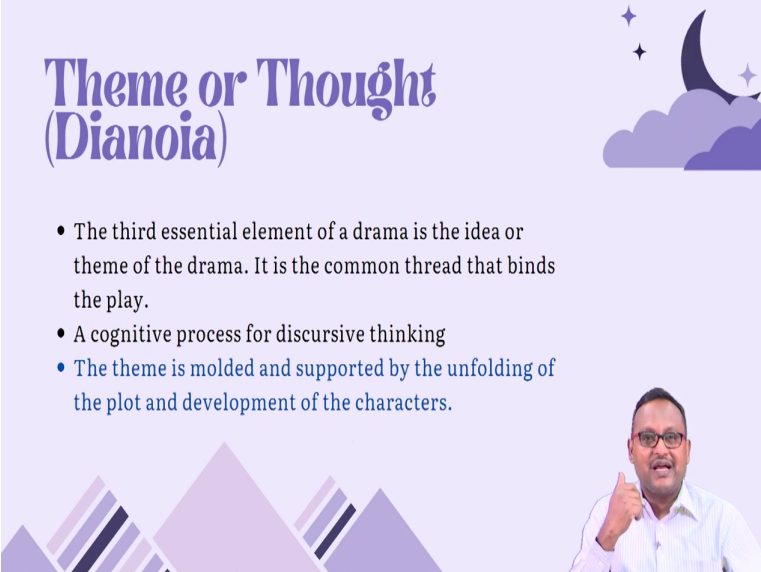


And again, there are various types of characters found in drama of course. We have discussed a round character, flat character, protagonist-antagonist and all that. Aristotle believed that in order for a protagonist in a tragedy to be effective, the protagonist should not be too much of an ideal character, not also a character who is morally depraved. Somebody who balances between the good and bad because if the person is too noble, too good, the audience would not believe, would not identify themselves with this character.

If he is godlike, he is not like us, why should we watch it? And if the protagonist is too much morally depraved, is too bad, then the audience lose respect for that. Therefore, he believed that a character has to be of a balanced background. So, that kind of a balanced protagonist is capable of arousing in the audience emotions of pity and fear.

In fact, they are the predominant emotions through pathos. He uses the term called 'pathos'. Through pathos, especially using pity and fear, an element of catharsis is achieved. A purgation of our own feelings when we watch these elements, we come across those elements, those emotions in us they get purged something like that was Aristotle's belief.

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**Theme or Thought
(Dianoia)**

- The third essential element of a drama is the idea or theme of the drama. It is the common thread that binds the play.
- A cognitive process for discursive thinking
- The theme is molded and supported by the unfolding of the plot and development of the characters.

The slide features a light purple background with decorative elements: a crescent moon and stars in the top right, and stylized mountains in the bottom left. A man in a white shirt and glasses is overlaid in the bottom right corner, pointing upwards.

From character let us go to theme or thought. In Greek its ‘dianoia’. This is the third essential element of drama according to Aristotle, because this is something that binds an entire play together. It is the common thread that binds the whole play. So, imagine it like a necklace of pearls. So, this is the thread that holds all the pearls. Otherwise, in the absence of it however precious the pearls are, well, if they are scattered, they are of no use.



So, in order to hold noble characters, extraordinary characters, extraordinary plot and all that you need to have a solid theme or a thought. Dianoia also has a very interesting meaning. In fact, in logic it refers to a cognitive process that is useful for discursive thinking or that is a result of a discursive thinking.

So, depending on the thought or the theme you can mould various characters, you can mold various situations, you can mold a setting. So, everything depends on it. It is like an invisible thread that connects everything in the play.

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Diction (Lexis)

- Diction refers to the words, style and language used by the characters.
- It is the script of the drama and therefore the greatness of a drama significantly depends on the quality of its diction or dialogues.
- The choice of words used by the writer determines how the theme will be revealed, what will be the mood of the drama.
- Aristotle considered it important that a work achieved a balance between poetic and prosaic (regular) diction. Regular speech provides clarity while poetic speech provides beauty



Now, from theme let's go and take a quick look at diction. It can also be construed as language depending on how you translate. In Greek of course, the word he uses is 'lexis'. Lexis refers to the choice of words. The choice of diction, the choice of language, phrases, what kind of language the characters employ when they are conversing with the fellow characters.

Especially, the language employed by the protagonist. So, this is a very significant element because in order for us to know what the character does. Of course, it is not a pantomime, remember it is not a mime. So, where there is no script all that we have to understand is through the facial expressions and the body movement.

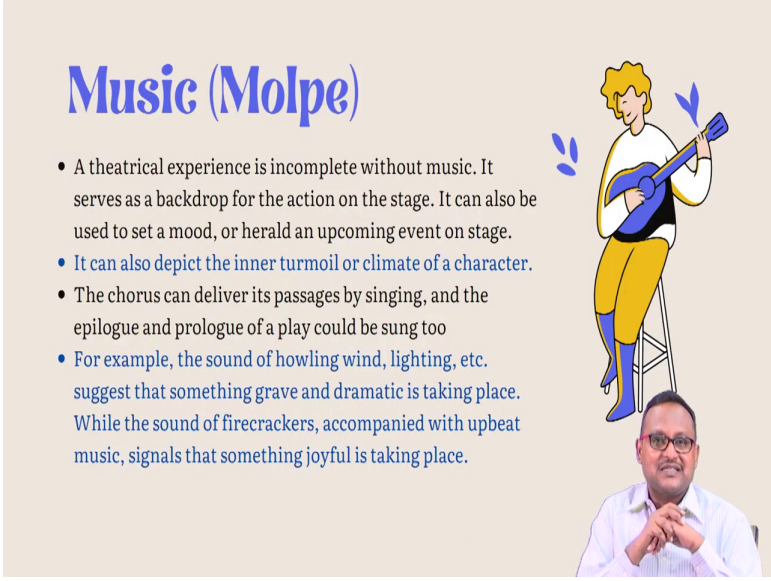
In a proper full-fledged drama, dialogues play an important role. Therefore, the choice of language that the playwright does or the director keeps in mind becomes very important. The actors', the characters' language. And then remember, at earlier times, it was a combination of verse and prose right. It was a kind of a combination of prose and verse. Even in the Indian context we say 'Champu', that is a distinct combination of poetry and prose. Champu Kavya, when we say Champu Kavya in Sanskrit poetics, what we mean is actually a combination of poetry and prose.

So, similarly he says what happens if you use too much of poetry. Of course, poetry adds an elevated beauty, but if the audience does not understand the elevated use of language well, it

may disorient the audience. On the other hand, if you use too much of prose it may lack elegance to it.



Therefore, an ideal drama is something that balances between regular speech, colloquial speech, or prose that adds clarity to the dialogue and poetic speech that lends the quality of beauty.

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Music (Molpe)

- A theatrical experience is incomplete without music. It serves as a backdrop for the action on the stage. It can also be used to set a mood, or herald an upcoming event on stage.
- It can also depict the inner turmoil or climate of a character.
- The chorus can deliver its passages by singing, and the epilogue and prologue of a play could be sung too
- For example, the sound of howling wind, lighting, etc. suggest that something grave and dramatic is taking place. While the sound of firecrackers, accompanied with upbeat music, signals that something joyful is taking place.



From here let us go and see one more component. This is music. Remember, for Aristotle music was a separable component from drama. Well, he believed that even without music drama would do well, but it's like ornamentation. A person can survive even without all those beautifications, jewels and all that right? So, he believed music lent an ornamentation to the drama.

But of course, there were many playwrights who did not agree with that because today you have a musical drama. We discussed that an opera is a musical drama, where music is the lifeblood of drama. Of course, even in a regular theatre music plays a very important role, either in setting the mood of the character or in setting the mood of the audience or even as a very interesting and an enriching prop, a stage prop music is employed, but for Aristotle it was not a very important thing.

So, he believed that it's a kind of an accompanying element in order to depict the inner turmoil of a character or the internal climate of a character. Remember we have the origins of

drama in music chorus because we say that the so-called concept of Greek drama or the western drama came out of chorus and chorus basically sang everything.

So, therefore, when we say ‘music’, we are basically referring to what the chorus does. Chorus basically sings and it interprets. We identified various functions of a chorus. So, when it comes to chorus basically it operates through music.

And of course, pathetic fallacy. We discussed pathetic fallacy, right? Of course, in order to portray the internal conflicts, the internal joys, you can make use of music. In the ancient times of course, music played a very important role, but maybe not by the time Aristotle began writing it.

Remember, he is a theorist; he is not a practitioner of drama. So, you can say that *Poetics* is basically a product of his inductive logic. What is inductive logic? Based on deductions, based on his observations of the plays of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, Aristophanes must have deduced a play must be like this, a play must be like that. Nevertheless, it’s a significant work, it is the first theoretical work.

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Spectacle (Opsis)

- Refers to anything that the audience sees.
- Visual Apparatus of Drama- Scenery, makeup, costumes, actor movements, and lighting are all part of it.
- The spectacle, like music, is crucial to the intensity of the theme, character, and plot.
- For example, in a garden setting, bright lights, gaudy makeup or costume indicates something entirely different than dim lights and gloomy makeup in a desert setting.
- It is the "least artistic" element of tragedy, and the "least connected with the work of the poet (playwright)



And finally, we have spectacle, the sixth element. Again, he considered ‘spectacle’ slightly important because spectacle in we have the Greek word ‘opsis’ which means anything that the audience sees is a visual apparatus, it is the visual apparatus of drama because when a drama is presented if when we say performing arts its meant to be seen, heard and

appreciated. So, what are those elements that the audience sees. Right from costumes to scenery to facial expressions, everything is part of spectacle.

Everything is part of spectacle except maybe thought and plot. In order for that to unfold properly, it has to be presented in a proper way. So, therefore, the movement of the actors, and the lighting area, the setting area, the curtains, the rich scenery backgrounds that they use, all of them form spectacle in the Greek context and for Aristotle.

Modern playwrights make a very a beautiful experimentation using spectacle. Now imagine Hamlet. I discussed Hamlet was performed on stage arena theatre properly. Now Hamlet is being performed, let us say, on a lake side. Hamlet is being performed in a garden setting with lights, without lights. So, the effect varies significantly. Therefore, in the hands of an able director, in the hands of an able dramatist, spectacle can take as significant position as drama. In fact, especially in the celluloid medium today spectacle is all right, because what we see determines the content, because ultimately how do we know the content unless we see it. Therefore, seeing the optic. So, therefore, spectacle is related to the optic of the drama and everything is related to the optic. That is why you we use the term optic.

So, though for Aristotle it is the least significant element of tragedy, in the hands of contemporary playwrights, in the hands of contemporary directors and dramatists, spectacle comes to occupy a very important significance. So, these are six distinct elements of drama that Aristotle highlights in his important work *Poetics*. So, in the next class probably we can discuss some other interesting concepts. Until then take care, bye-bye.