

**Literary Theory and Literary Criticism**  
**Prof. Aysha Iqbal**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**

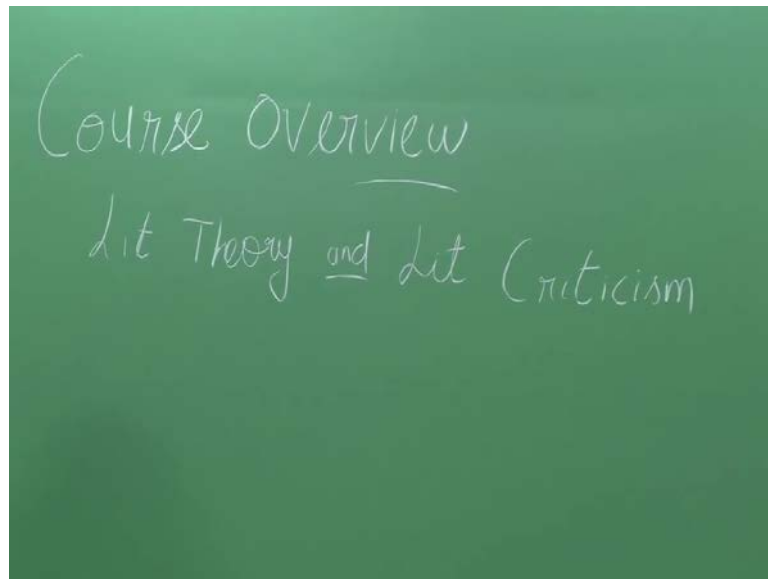
**Lecture – 1**

**Part A**

**Introduction and Course Overview**

Welcome friends to this very first lecture for the course – literary theory and literary criticism.

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I am your instructor Prof Aysha Iqbal Vishwamohan. And we will be meeting regularly for this course that you are going to certificate for. Before we go any further into this course, I just wanted to give you very good introduction to the course – what does this course entail. This course basically is meant for as the website suggests, for people who are from certain age, who have crossed certain level; and is meant for everyone. So, it is open basically to people who have registered for the course. A background to literature is desirable, but not absolutely necessary. So, what I mean is that, even if you come from another discipline, which is not literature-based, you are welcome to this course. I hope you would not find it too difficult. We will try to make the course as accessible as

possible. So, this course will be taught by me and also by Dr Vimal Mohan John, who is the co-instructor for this.

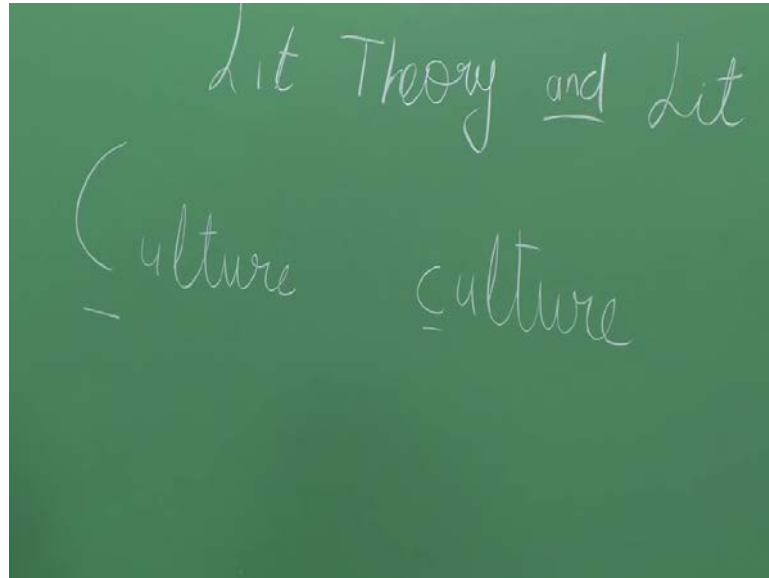
Now, what does this course entail? What are the key components? I am very sure that, most of you have already gone through the website of NPTEL and you know what are the essential ingredients of this course, but I also thought that, in order to take you farther in this course, it is essential to have a good and in-depth understanding of what this course entails. So, the basic idea to introduce this course was that, we realise that, the students of literature today – they are confronted with an array of theories; and these theories deal with our idea of domains; I mean you have textuality, you have language, you have ((Refer Time: 02:43)) based studies; you have the reading process and various socio and political and also cultural context. We also look at gender and psychology of a character, reception of a text, the emotional effect on the readers and so on. So, we thought it desirable to have a course, which gives you an overview of key theories. Contemporary theories – yes; twentieth century theories of course; but we would commence the course by ((Refer Time: 03:30)) to the times are the greatest western thinkers.

Let me also tell you at this point that, this is the course in western literary theory and western literary criticism. So, coming back to my earlier point, we are going back to the times of the greatest western thinkers – Plato, Aristotle, Longinus, Horace, Kant and Hegel, Sheller, Freud; also, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Pope, Dryden and very recent theories as well. So, the course is designed to facilitate the process of making theories accessible to students by offering the students basic yet essential information on the major western theories, theorists, the key thinkers and their seminal works.

Now, let me give you an overview of what are going to be the major topics of discussion here. So, for the starters, you will gain familiarity with some key concepts in literary theory and literary criticism; for instance, allegory, illusion, irony, defamiliarization, carnival, bricolage, postmodernism and its features, pastiche, simulation and so on. We will also try to talk about what is culture. And I am very sure that, most of you are familiar with Raymond Williams and culture – his theories of culture. And Raymond Williams's seminal work culture and society; in which, he attempts to theorise culture as the whole way of life. And here he interprets some keywords such as industry, democracy, class, art, literature; and argued how meanings change with the passage of

time. This is important that, very often we find a word in literature meant something at the beginning. And during the course of time, it acquires some other meaning.

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Going back to Raymond Williams – in his book, *The Long Revolution*; Williams famously distinguishes between culture with a capital C and culture with a lowercase c; capital C, lowercase c. And for Williams, the capital C culture is high culture, which is a sum total of civilizations greatest moral and aesthetic achievements as seen in the works of F. R. Leavis and Matthew Arnold before him. So, for Williams, the obvious agenda of having culture is to maintain the distinction between highbrow and lowbrow; in other words, to maintain social class. This is something that we will be doing in greater detail and analyse it further when we do the course – key concepts in literary theory and literary criticism. Now, following that, we will be doing classical theory.

Now, what is classical theory? So, we will be looking at Greek and Roman models of literary criticism with an emphasis on classical qualities. We will be focusing on the literary criticism of thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle, Horace and Longinus. And we will be looking at theories of drama, poetry and style. The course will also look at neoclassical theory, which includes early modern and enlightenment thinkers and writers such as Philip Sidney, Dryden, Pope, Samuel Johnson, Addison and Locke. We will be also considering Horace's *Ars Poetica* and Longinus's *Concept of Sublimity*. The next topic would be romanticism. To begin with, we will look at early nineteenth century

romanticism with particular reference to French and German romanticism, where the key writers are Schiller and German Destel, also Immanuel Kant, and Hegel. So, we will also look at Kant's critique of judgement. This will be followed by an in-depth study of English and American romanticism. The key writers – they are of course William Wordsworth, Coleridge; and in America, we have Emerson and also Edgar Allan Poe.

We look at the concepts of poetic diction, fancy and imagination. And we will also understand the critical significance of profess to lyrical ballads and *biographia literaria*. Just to give an understanding of this movement – what is romanticism; so I am sure most of you know what is romanticism? It is a literary artistic and philosophical movement that originated in Europe in the eighteenth century and lasted until the mid-nineteenth century. Romanticism is characterized chiefly by a reaction against enlightenment and neoclassicism with there is stress on reason, rationality, order, balance, etcetera. Romanticism on the other hand emphasise the individual, the subject, the spontaneous; often the visionary, the mystical and also the imaginative. Among the characteristic attitudes of romanticism were a deep sense of the beauty of nature, a general exultation of emotion over reason and of the senses over intellect. And romanticism was also preoccupied with the genius, the hero and a view of the artists as a supremely individual creator. The movement included an interest in folk culture, national and ethnic cultural origins and the medieval era.

Romanticise also showed interest in the mysterious, the occult and the exotic; for example, Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. We must also note that, the first phase of the romantic movement in Germany was marked by innovations in both content and literary style and by a preoccupation with the mystical, the subconscious and the supernatural. So, this in short is what we are going to do in romanticism. We will also move on to late nineteenth century criticism after that; where, the defining theories were that of realism and naturalism. And the key theories are Emile Zola, Henry James. We will also look at symbolism and aestheticism in detail with particular reference to Charles Baudelaire and also Oscar Wilde. We will understand what is the meaning of art for art sake and also touch upon Arnold and Estas Tonne method. T. S. Eliot is also one of the key writers of this time and we will understand his theories of objective correlative, dissociation of sensibility and impersonality of art.

We will then move on to twentieth century criticism with a specific reference to formalism and new criticism. Archetypal criticism is also going to be one major area of discussion. I am sure you know that, this is a form of literary criticism that is concerned with the analysis of the original patterns for themes, motives and characters in poetry and prose. This approach to literature is based on the idea that, narratives are a structure according to an archetype or archetypal model. And plot and character are important in so far as they allude to a traditional plot or figure or to patterns that have recurred with wide implications in history. So, what is an archetype? You may ask so. An archetype is a primordial image, character or pattern of circumstances that recurs throughout literature enough to be considered universal.

The term was adopted by literary critics from the writings of the psychologist Carl Jung, who formulated the theory of the Collective Unconscious. For Jung, the varieties of human experience have somehow been genetically coded and transferred to successive generations. Some of the very common examples of archetypal objects are and also all archetypal creatures are the olive branches, the snake, whale, the eagle, the vulture. And all these are archetypal symbols. A common example is the theme of initiation, the passage from innocence to experience and the quest motif.

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### From The Golden Bough by James Frazer

A USEFUL clue to the original nature of a god or goddess is often furnished by the season at which his or her festival is celebrated. Thus, if the festival falls at the new or the full moon, there is a certain presumption that the deity thus honoured either is the moon or at least has lunar affinities. If the festival is held at the winter or summer solstice, we naturally surmise that the god is the sun, or at all events that he stands in some close relation to that luminary. Again, if the festival coincides with the time of sowing or harvest, we are inclined to infer that the divinity is an embodiment of the earth or of the corn. These presumptions or inferences, taken by themselves, are by no means conclusive; but if they happen to be confirmed by other indications, the evidence may be regarded as fairly strong.

At this point, let me draw your attention to the seminal book – The Golden Bough by James Frazer. And let us see what Frazer tells us about archetype. A useful clue to the

original nature of a god or goddesses is often furnished by the season at which his or her festival is celebrated. Thus, if the festival falls at the new or the full moon, there is a certain presumption that the deity thus honoured either is the moon or at least has lunar affinities. If the festival is held at the winter or summer solstice, we naturally surmise that the god is the sun or at all events that he stands in some close relation to that luminary. Again, if the festival coincides with the time of sowing or harvest, we are inclined to infer that the divinity is an embodiment of the earth or of the corn. These presumptions or inferences, taken by themselves, are by no means conclusive; but if they happen to be confirmed by other indications, the evidence may be regarded as fairly strong.

Now, what is being discussed here? The idea of seasons – the universal archetype, the universal pattern of seasons; so what is being described here or what is Frazer trying to tell us here? The universal pattern of festivals and seasons; and those of us who are interested in understanding these kinds of theories – they will understand, they will appreciate that there are archetypes that exist all around us. So, this theory will give you good indication to understand some of the archetypes that exist universally. The key writers that we will be focusing would be Northrop Frye and *Anatomy of Criticism*, Joseph Campbell, the hero and his – the hero with the thousand faces; and also, Bodkin and his archetypal patterns in poetry. We will look at his structuralism and start with the theories of a Ferdinand de Saussure; and also Charles Peirce; Roland Barthes will be another key theorist for his structuralism.

And we will also consider Claude Levi-Strauss and his mythologies. His structuralism is a critical movement of the twentieth century. It was based on the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de Saussure; and held that language is a self contained system of science. It was also based on the cultural theories of Claude Levi-Strauss, who held that cultures like languages could be viewed as systems of science and could be analysed in terms of the structural relations among the elements. The structuralism in the 70's was an important phenomenon because of the publication of a number of influential expository works by American Academics including Fredric Jameson's, *The Prison-House of Language*, and Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics*. And Saussure; his structuralism helped to eliminate any sense in which literature operated outside or apart from culture by stressing the implication of literature and other cultural practices in and elaborate

network of science. This also led to the undermining of the artist or the author; hence, Roland Barthes' now famous claim that the author was dead.

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## Assignment

- Who are the main characters in Plato's *Ion*?
- Name any 3 books on and about archetypal criticism.
- Who are the major writers of the aesthetic movement in Europe?
- Who is the author of *S/Z*?

At this point, I would draw your attention to an assignment which you should be submitting by the deadline. Question 1 – who are the main characters in Plato's *Ion*? Remember for this assignment, you will have to do some reading of your own. And this has to be submitted according to the date given. So, please stick to the deadline. So, who are the main characters in Plato's *Ion*? Second question – name any three books on and about archetypal criticism. Third – who are the major writers of the aesthetic movement in Europe. And the last question – who is the author of *S by Z*?

Our next topic would be reader response criticism. This is a critical method that examines the reader and the act of reading, rather than the text being read. So, remember a note – the important phrase – the act of reading. The reader response approach evolved out of phenomenological and interpretive analysis, and is closely associated to reception theory. Some of the key writers of reader-response theory are ((Refer Time: 20:57)) Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish. We will also look at the concept of interpretive communities and Fish's famous – is there a text in this class?

Our next topic would be semiotics. Now, what is semiotics? We are surrounded with semiotics, which is nothing but the study of science. So, semiology was defined by one of its founders – the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure as the study of the life of

science within society. The idea of semiotics as an interdisciplinary mode for examining phenomena in different fields emerged in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century's with the independent works of Saussure and of the American philosopher and writer Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce defined a sign as something which stands to somebody for something. And one of his major contributions to semiotics was the categorisation of science into three main types: an icon, an index, and a symbol. Modern semioticians have applied Peirce's and Saussure's principles to several fields including aesthetics and sociology, communications and psychology. And our endeavour would be to attain or to gain an overview of this. The most significant names associated with the theory of semiotics are Claude Levi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva. We will also look at Umberto Eco and his a theory of semiotics.

The next area of discussion would be film theory. I am sure all of us here are interested in watching films; but in this course, you will understand not just what movies to watch; but also how to appreciate films. So, the notion of film theory started in the mid-1950's. Of course, there were attempts to theorize cinema even before that. But from the mid 50's onwards, it began to be taken very seriously; and it has started with the work of the *kayo* – the cinema, writers, who propounded the notion of film authorship. In 1948, a French writer Alexandre Astruc published an essay in *L'Ecran française* entitled *la camera-stylo*, which is *la camera as a pen*; therefore, the idea of the director as an author. And therefore, we get something called the *auteur theory*. And this was *auteur theory* in France; later, in America, it was popularised particularly due to the efforts made by someone called Andrew Sarris.

We will also look at cinema and modernism. And as we know, modernism deals with the questions of aesthetics and art; and attempts to steer clear of the constraints or verisimilitude of realism. So, this will be discussed in detail in the lectures on film theory. And we will also look at the American ((Refer Time: 25:10)) cinema of the 1960's to the mid 70's. Some major international film movements will also be given attention, for example, the French New Wave and Italian neorealism. We will also understand what was meant by German expressionism. We will continue with this lecture in our next class.