

**American Literature & Culture**  
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**Mod 12 Lecture Number 44**  
**Christopher Hitchens Jewish power, Jewish peril (Lecture 38)**

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M: So good morning, Christopher Hitchens, Jewish Power, Jewish Peril. Now before we start I want to ask you some questions now, who is Christopher Hitchens? How much do you know of him?

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R: I know of his book called Hitch 22

M: His book called?

R: Hitch 22

M: Hitch 22, Ok good, so he is the author of

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M: it's a play on Catch 22, yeah, Hitch 22

R: I happened to see a debate he had

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R: with Shashi Tharoor

M: And it was on, debate on Shashi Tharoor

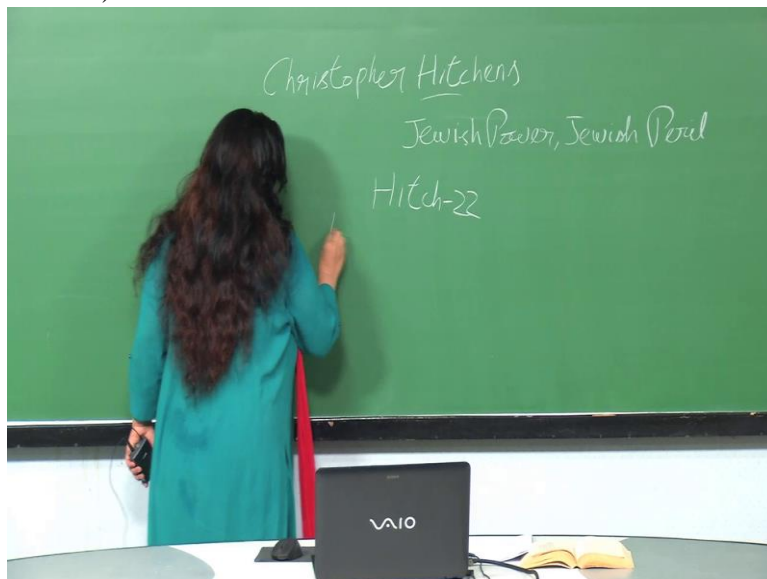
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R: I cannot recall, I think it was on

M: Hinduism, Islam Ok alright.

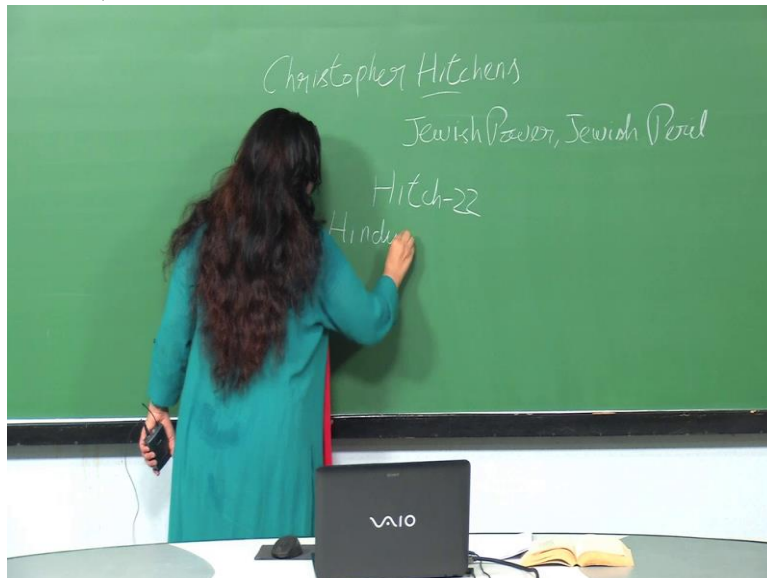
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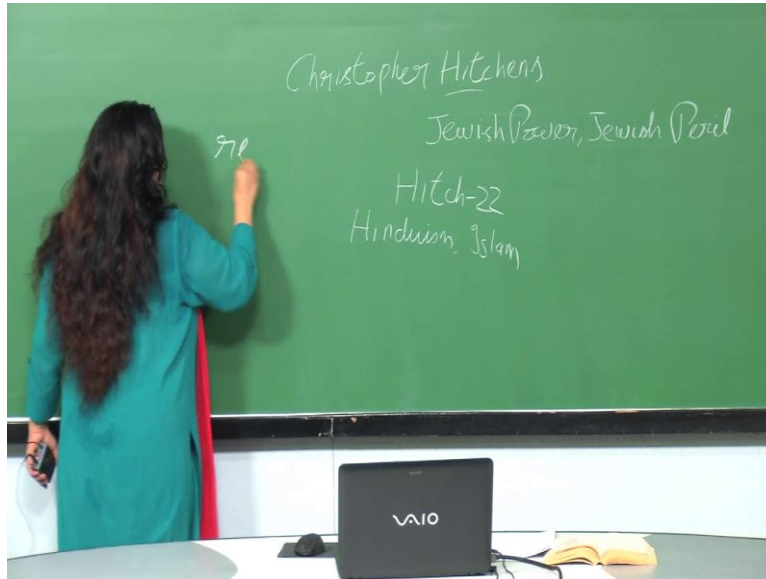


M: So yeah Hinduism, Islam and of course you have the title itself. So what kind of picture emerges, his interest?

R: Religion

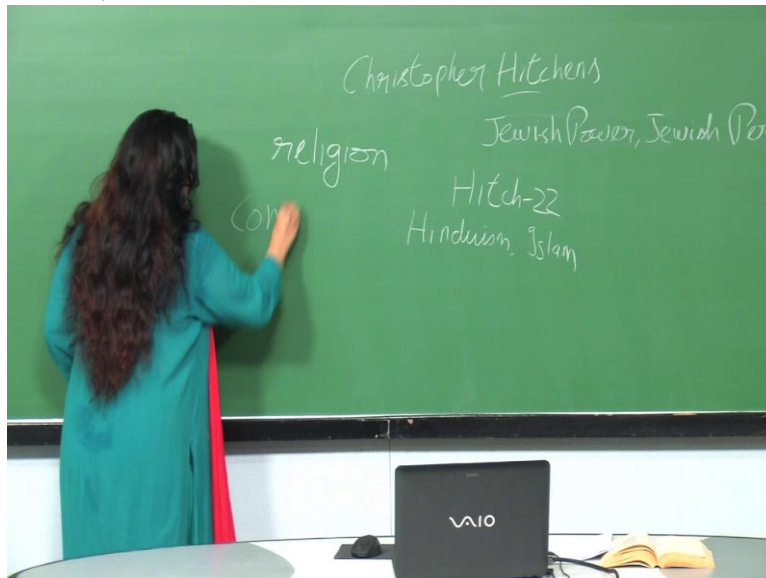
M: Good, so he is

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M: into religion but that's not all, that's not all. Ok. He is much more than that. Yeah so well, this is one of the most controversial figures in contemporary American or on contemporary American literary scene. Now by contemporary, he is no more, he died in 2011 but he is very relevant. You may, you may not agree with his perspectives, with his point of view which are deliberately controversial and confrontational.

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M: So religion is one of his interests, confrontational style, he is also a literary critic, Ok and a political observer. He has a great style, Ok. We are not interested in the man's opinion, right wing, left wing or at the center

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M: or at the center and leaning towards the left or right, most of us are that way but he gets quite confrontational about his position but at the same time you need to think what he is trying to say and at the same time, need to understand the inherent contradictions in his philosophy. He is a philosopher; he is a thinker, no doubt about it; but a philosopher of a very different kind. He is very open and he is many things, you know, it is difficult to encapsulate the essence of Christopher Hitchens in one class. But, Ok let me just tell you, he is the author of 30 books so you can well imagine how busy he must have been throughout his life.

So he has authored 30 books. Most of the time he was based in Washington with his wife, I think Carol, she is also a documentary film maker and all, Carol Blue and she is still around, she survives him and I will just tell you, when he died; it is a very interesting anecdote, do you know who is Graydon Carter, Graydon Carter doesn't the name ring a bell? The great Graydon Carter, he is the editor of Vanity Fair. Why I am talking about it, because the article that we have chosen today, comes from, is sourced from Vanity Fair, right?

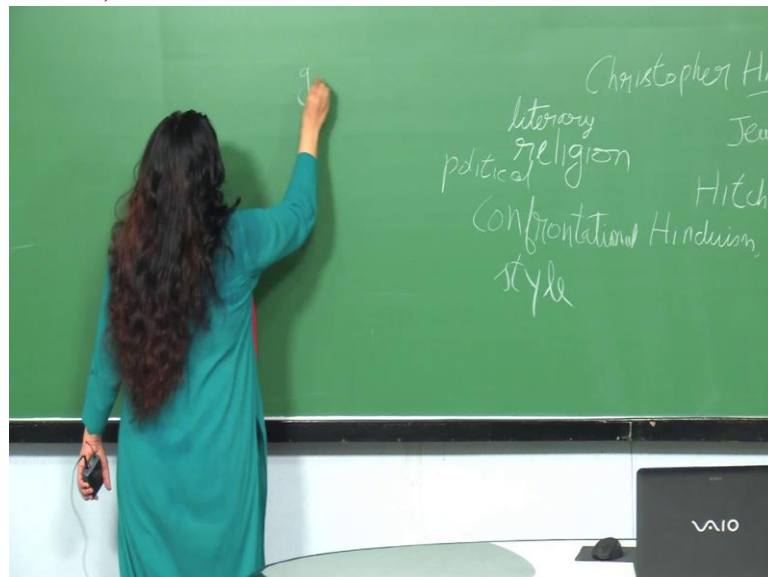
Yeah so he was a constant contributor for Vanity Fair and Graydon Carter who knew him very well is the editor of Vanity Fair. And he has on Hitchen's obituary, Carter said that, he wrote a column about Hitchens and he said that that I knew Hitchens very well. We went out for lunch one day and he was supposed to submit a thousand word column before noon, you know, so that it can go to the press. Now 1000 word is quite a bit and that too, within one hour or half an hour. Ok but they were lunching before that and he hadn't started writing and

he had to submit, there was a deadline and then typically Hitchens started with a canister full of scotch and downed several canisters.

And then lunch was accompanied by some good quality wine and lunch was followed by some excellent cognac. Now what does that tell you about the man? We have done Hemingway, right and *The Sun also Rises*, and kind of people, especially writers yeah and they get fuelled when they drink so heavily. So he had reputation for his drinks and the character of Peter Fallow from *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Ok, Peter Fallow is loosely based on Christopher Hitchens, Ok because that's the, yes, Tom Wolfe, Christopher Hitchens, sorry Martin Amis, Ian McEwan they are all contemporary, Ok and if you read Peter Fallow you know what colorful interesting character he emerges as.

Fallow is not Jewish, he is British. Yeah, not Jewish but it was based on him, yeah; loosely. There were other characters also but at least the drinking part, the way he would drink and start his day with heavy drinks and all; that is based partly, loosely on Hitchen's character. So yeah, Hitchen's interests politics, religion, literature, he has also written a book called very interestingly titled,

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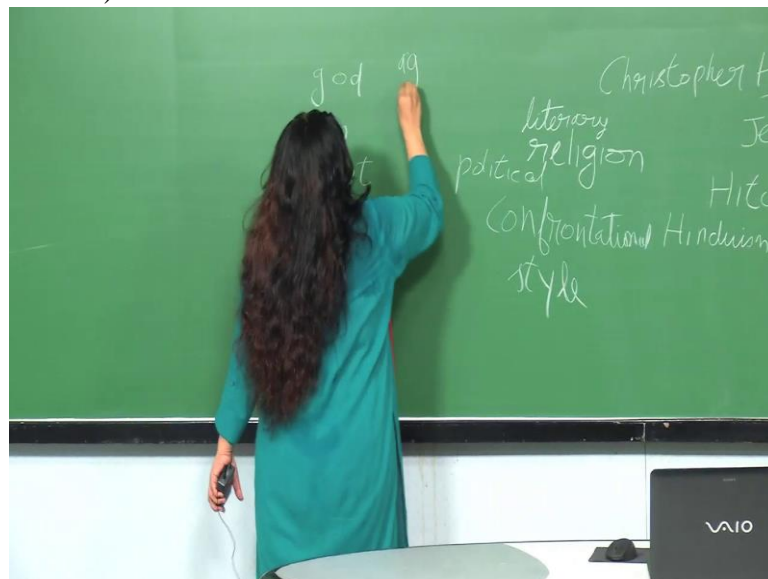
M: “god is not Great” and this is the way it appears, comment on it and he is unapologetic.

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M: He is not the kind of writers who would write something and sensationalize it, although he accepts that yes it is a sensationalist title and I did it to generate some kind of debate and controversy, so you know, took lot of delight in his position as

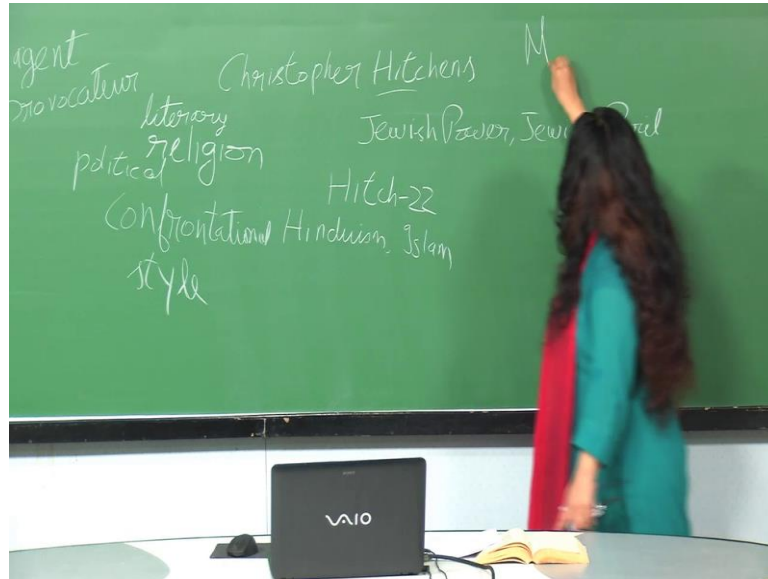
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M: An agent provocateur, you understand this word, it's a French word agent provocateur, agent of provocation, someone who deliberately create some kind of provocation, deliberately provokes certain established doctrines and dogma and generate controversy and invite debate and that's his style. That remained till the end. He began as Marxist socialist



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M: the way most thinkers do. he was also, during his young age or during his college days he was anti-Vietnam war like most students of that period but gradually he shifted his position, his ideologies. He felt the state or the ideology has failed on all and the state of the nations that based their political ideologies on these, Marxism and socialism, they have more or less failed. We know what we are talking about, which states are those. And he also felt that even in America, Marxism and socialism has taken a different turn and not what it should be, Ok. , he had the position on Gulf war, very strong which many of us may or may not agree with. He has a very strong position of the, on Palestinian, Israel Palestinian issue, that is what we are going to look at in brief today.

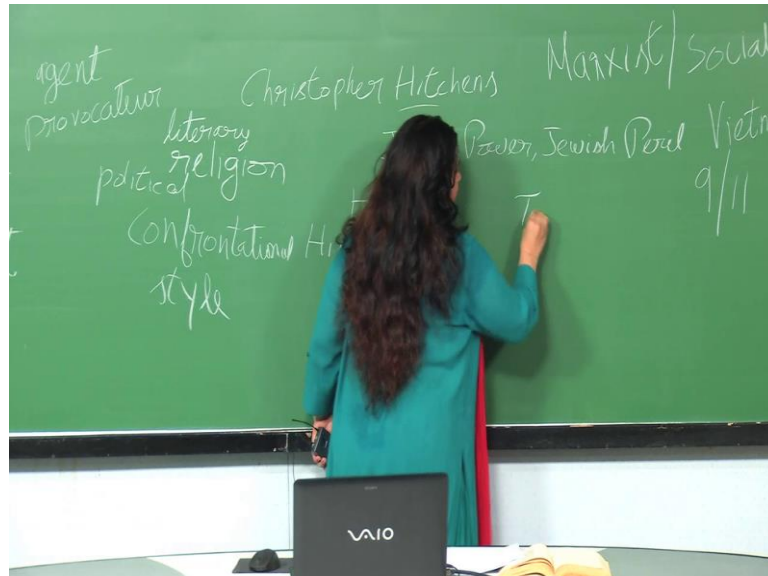
Another important event was

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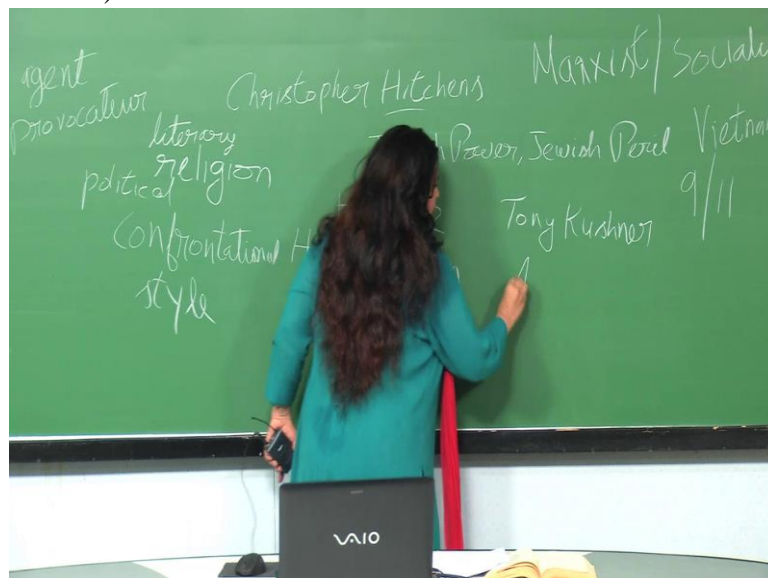
M: 9/11 which happened in 2001 and after that he famously said the attack exhilarated him, why? Because he says that finally people can now talk about the battle between everything I love and everything I hate. See Jewish writing is also important from the Jew perspective, Ok. We have several great Jewish authors, Ok; we need to consider that also. Philip Roth for example, is an extremely important writer who was a great friend of Hitchens, Martin Amis of course and Tony Kushner, the other day I was talking

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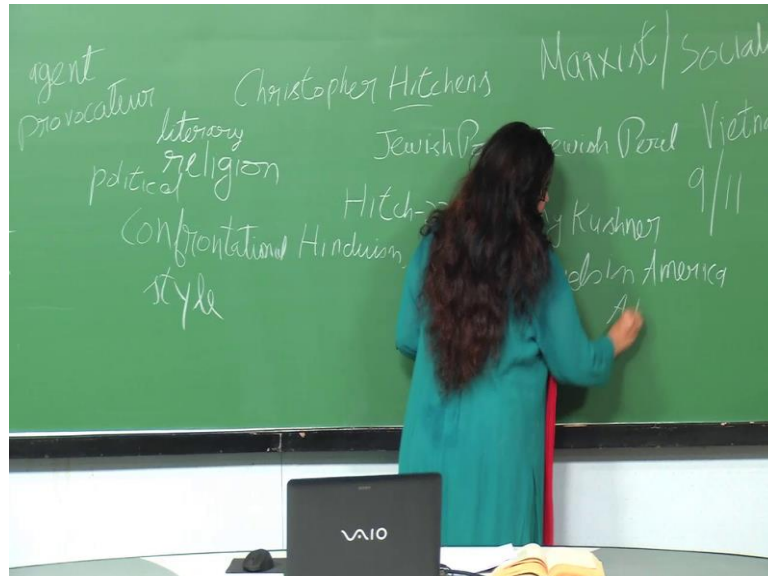
M: about Tony Kushner and his, I told you he is the screen writer for Munich, he is a screen writer for Lincoln but he is best known for his Pulitzer winning play called? Angels in America, remember that.

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M: See we cannot be doing everything in this course but you have to know certain literary texts on your own. So *Angels in America* is one of the greatest contemporary plays written by a Jewish writer and as I was telling you, Hitchens was a literary critic and he has written a great piece on *Angels in America*. So I think you should also look at that, what Hitchens says about, yeah because the play takes into account several issues particularly the McCarthy period, then homosexuality and also

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M: AIDS, Ok. This is one subject that was not really out in the open at least in the 80s but *Angels in America* took the subject, took the theme by its horns and did a, I mean it's a very, very nice play, very good play and it has to be read in order to understand number of issues that ail contemporary America and how the writer has tackled that and you have to also read Hitchens's critique or review of the play.

Ok so before we move on to do the text, how many of you have read the text?

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R: Somewhere that Hitchens, Dawkins and two other public intellectuals are known as, Mr. Dawkins and two other people, excuse me I cannot recall them, all four are known as The Four Horsemen of Doom, and they all four very famous for coming out in the open with their atheist, very radically atheist sounds against other people. But he seems quite similar in his stance to Dawkins, Richard Dawkins as well. And they are anti-religion but since they are speaking very specifically US oriented point of view, the religion they take up will mostly be Islam or Christianity.

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M: So let's start with the text now, Jewish Power, Jewish Peril now whatever that means so. He the introduction because the article comes from Vanity Fair, at it says in seamless prose that links history to current events Christopher Hitchens brings clarity to some of the most

complex issues we face today, whether the subject is the trouble within the marriage of the so-called European Union or the role of a tiny Gulf state like Qatar as a possible model for opposed Hussain-free era. He offers piercing insights borne out of ambitious reporting.

Now I want you to look at the first paragraph.

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R: Two old Jewish men are sitting on a park bench in Berlin in the early 1930s. Things are not yet so bad, but that doesn't mean they won't get worse. One of the two is solemnly reading a Jewish newspaper. The other is scanning a Nazi paper, and laughing out loud. Finally, the first man stops reading and says, "It's bad enough that you read that pro-Hitler rag. But to laugh at it!" The second responds with a shrug. "What if I read your paper? It tells me about Jewish windows being broken, Jewish shops boycotted, Jewish children beaten up in school. So ... if I read the Hitler paper it tells me that we Jews control the whole world."

M: Ok so that's a bad joke, Ok but that's a joke

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M: and that is the Jewish predicament in early 30s. Now we are talking, he has taken us back to that history just before the Holocaust. Alright how many of us are here who do not know these very basic terms? Have you read any literature of Holocaust? Yes, Namita

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R: Man's Search for Meaning by Viktor Frankl

M: Ok Man's Search for?

R: Meaning

M: Ok by

R: Viktor Frankl

M: By Viktor Frankl?

R: Yeah

M: Ok, anything else?

R: The Diary of a Young Girl

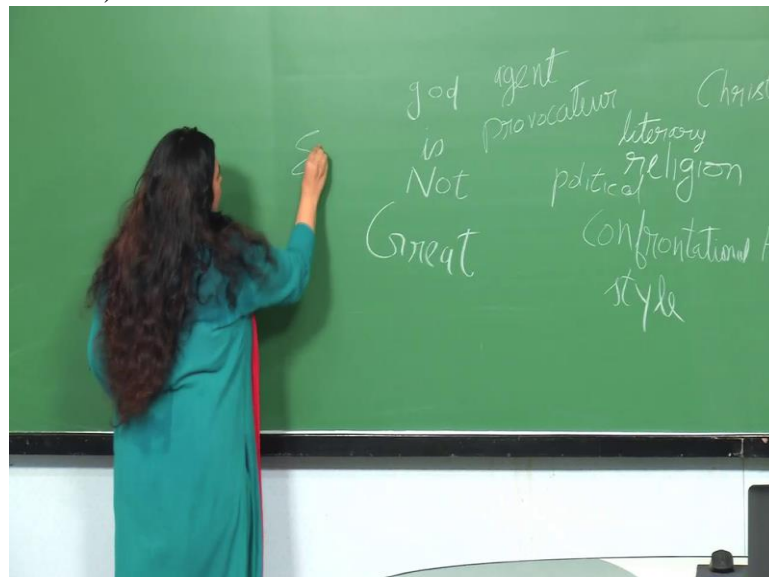
M: The Diary of a Young Girl, alright. I was looking forward to

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M: something more complex. Have you come across Hannah Arendt's Eichmann's trial (Eichmann in Jerusalem). Eichmann, have you heard this name? So just let me write it for the benefit of viewers, Hannah Arendt

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M: and Eichmann who was?

R: One of the top Nazi leaders

M: He was one of the top Nazi Generals, sorry leader who carried on the order for all the atrocities that happened in Germany, especially in Auschwitz, Ok and what happened after war?

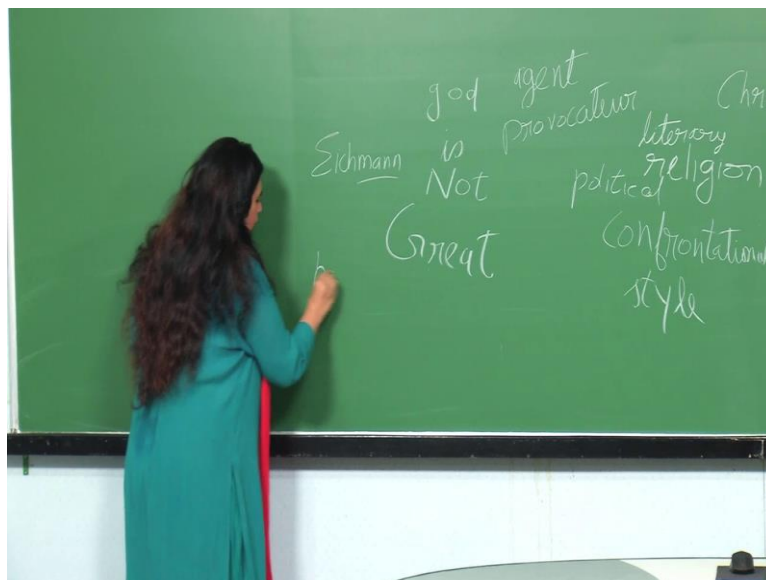
R: Tried at Nuremberg

M: Good

R: And

M: He was tried at Nuremberg. It was a very well publicized, very well covered, internationally well covered incident trial, the trial of Eichmann and what does Hanna Arendt, Hanna Arendt is a Jew, Ok and most famously she has written a book called On Violence. You must read that, if you haven't already then at least be familiar with what she says in On Violence. Now she says that she was, people went there all planned, ready to hate Eichmann. They must have thought that any man who can order the killing of so many innocent children and women and all those Jews in captivity, he has got to be an out and out demon, a Satan on two legs but when she met, she came face to face and she saw him being tried there, she felt he was just an ordinary man, Ok just an ordinary man like any person next door. Now what does that mean? So she has famously given us, coined the term called

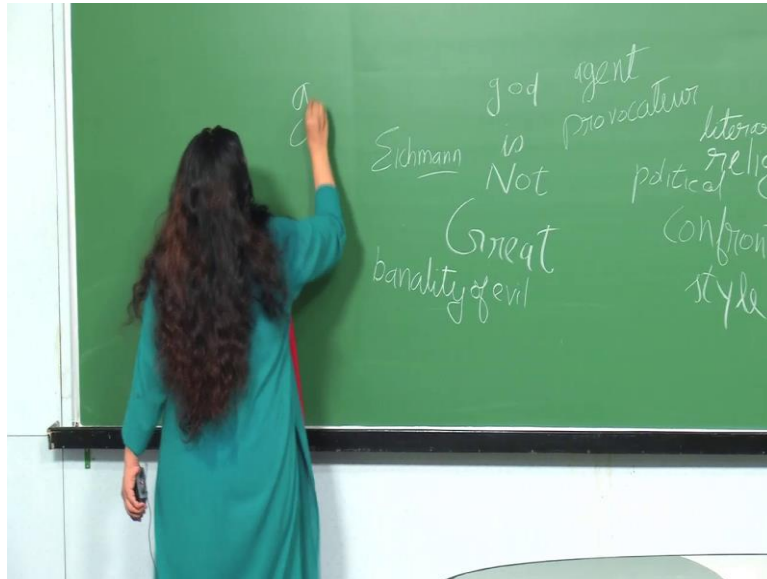
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M: banality of evil. This is Hannah Arendt's term, banality of evil where she says that, Eichmann says that when he was asked why did you do that? Why did you order that kind of massacre, annihilation of the Jews? He says I was just taking orders. And it so happens because the other day we were talking about Arthur Miller also and I said a very prominent theme



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M: in most, Arthur Miller is a Jew, so most Jewish writers; particularly Miller is the theme of guilt and responsibility. Miller too has written something about Eichmann's trial, that's not our concern right now. But Miller said that he too was taken aback how guilt-free Eichmann felt and how free of responsibility he felt during the trial. He was not guilty, he did not show any guilt and he did not take any responsibility. He had just one response. I was just taking orders. Now Hannah Arendt says that how banal! You are just taking orders. Anyone can tell you do anything so; you are evil but at the same time a very stupid person. You are not even a cunning or a evil in the real sense who has, who has some ability to think for himself. But you are just the very foolish, just taking the order kind of an evil; therefore the term banality of evil, alright. So from there we move on, that is the 30s and the 40s that we are talking about and then

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R: As I began to write this article, synagogues had been firebombed in several French towns and in one north London suburb and a suicide assassin had massacred Jews who just minutes earlier had arrived from synagogues for a Pass-over dinner in the Israeli coastal town of Netanya. In response, American Jews in California had taken out an advertisement urging Woody Allen and others to boycott the Cannes Film Festival, on the grounds that the days of Vichy were back. Similar themes were being stressed by many Jewish and Israeli writers, who spoke darkly of the imminence of another Holocaust. Very often recently, this “Never Again” note has been struck by liberal and even radical Jews who seem to regret their former softness. Nat Hentoff, civil libertarian and longtime friend of the civil-rights movement, told New York magazine that “if a loudspeaker goes off and a voice says, ‘All Jews gather in Times Square,’ it could never surprise me.”

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M: Now what does this mean? There is a Neo-Fascism in the air, or there is a new anti-Semitic feeling in the air. But what's the time we are talking about? Which period are we talking about? Ok, so early 90s again, you have this renewed interest, I mean every country goes through a wave of anti any race or anti any religion, Oh yeah, so in the early 90s the problem was, again the people had started becoming Anti-Jews now whatever could be the reason for that.

Maybe Jews were becoming again quite prominent, quite dominant all over the place and people don't like that. Jewish supremacy, that has always been a threat, Ok and then we have these Israel Palestinian issues, Ok and the threat from Islam and its proponent who want, who want the break in the peace, so-called peace talks. If there are peace talks in progress between Israel and Palestinian groups then they have to be halted and therefore these renewed attacks on Jews and their symbols such as synagogue.

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M: Now on the grounds of days of Vichy were back, what is Vichy? It is not witchy but it is Vichy, what is Vichy? It's a, any one, it is a very important, Holocaust, Auschwitz, Vichy, these are all interconnected. There is a theme and there is a thread that runs through. Vichy is a place in France and Vichy was one of the places in France that was controlled by the Nazis. This was, and the Jews were prosecuted very badly in Vichy during the 40s. It was the same; it was nearly as bad as the Holocaust in Berlin or any other part of Germany. So Vichy is remembered for that, Ok; Germany was; they were also able to capture or take over the control of Poland to some extent. I am sure you are aware of Sophie's Choice, Ok, one of the greatest novels ever written so the Jewish, the Jews and their, the entire idea of Anti-Semitism.

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M: Now I have to, what does it mean?

Nat Hentoff, civil libertarian and longtime friend of this and yeah, "if a loudspeaker goes off and a voice says, 'All Jews gather in Times Square,' it could never surprise me."

What do you understand by this?

R: It is referring to the Concentration Camp.

M: Almost going back to the concentration camp, in 90s and people said "Never Again" and for us, people sitting in this part of the world, it's very difficult to believe all these things happening but then perhaps it is possible. Ok, that is what he is trying to tell us. The kind of attacks that are happening on Jews in various parts of the world, it wouldn't surprise anyone if the Jews are asked to come in Times Square and they are packed off to some kind of a concentration camp, Ok. It is that bad, alright. Now it is also interesting to note that when Hitchens was growing up, his parents hid the fact that they were a Jew family, yeah. He says that I was never told till he was quite old and he said but somehow I had always guessed that something is different about us. So that is the idea, the idea of being perhaps a little marginalized, perhaps a little ostracized, Ok that feelings were already there, always there.

Now next line,

Perhaps I should say here that I am related on my mother's side to this ancient argument and that, according to the Law of Moses, the Israeli Law of Return, and the Nuremberg laws, I can be counted as a member of the ancient tribe.

So I can be a Jew and he is a Jew from his mother's side.

I maintain that I have the best evidence of Darwin and DNA on my side, as well as many recent -anti-Biblical and -anti-mythical discoveries made by Israeli archeologists. Ze'ev Herzog, professor of archaeology at Tel Aviv University, has concluded that "the Israelites were never in Egypt, did not wander in the desert, did not conquer the land in a military campaign, and did not pass it on to the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Furthermore, the united monarchy of David and Solomon, which is described by the Bible as a religious power, was at most a small tribal kingdom.

Now what is the significance of all this? How history is reinterpreted in every age, in every society? You know there is a renewed interest in religion and history and then there are renewed comments on history and literature and history and religion, sorry not literature. So it is always that whether we should take religion that seriously or not? That is there but he agrees to that, may be did not happen but at the same time

Nonetheless, I like to think that I would be despised or hated by any movement defining itself as -anti-Semitic. And on my shelf is an American Nazi pamphlet, denouncing the “Zionist Occupation Government” (or “zog”)

What is Zionist?

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R: It is the land promised to them.

M: Promised land, Ok so people who actually ask for the Promised Land, there has to be the Promised Land and this is what the article is all about. If you don't know what is Zion and what is the Promised Land, the idea of the Jews being given the Promised Land has always been in existence, in history, in culture, in Bible, in religion. Ok but whether they will be given that or not and how important it is to have a Promised Land and if they are given then what are the implications. This is what the article talks about.

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M: Alright, so at some point he also says the protocols have been repeatedly and conclusively shown to be a crass forgery, originating in the witch trials of the Middle Ages and updated for the modern world via the reactionary secret police of the Russian czars and the publishers of Mein Kempf. (In neither circle, incidentally, were Arabs or Muslims regarded very highly.) Here again we find a version of the same sick joke: the Jews are supposed to be diabolical and clever enough to plot a secret world rule, and stupid enough to write the whole plan down.

Ok so there is a book in circulation, the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, this is how Jews have been projected. There is some kind of a secret society that is plotting to take the world down. Hitchens takes a position which is extremely pro-Jewish Ok, in spite of all his claims that he is anti-religion and atheist and all, but in spite of that, he takes a very strong position.

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M: So we need to now read the article to discuss it better. So I would ask you to read, come having and prepared the article and read some more or watch some more videos about Hitchens position on Hinduism, his debate with Shashi Tharoor and also his position on the Palestinian issue. Only then we can discuss it further, alright? So thank you.

(Professor – student conversation ends)