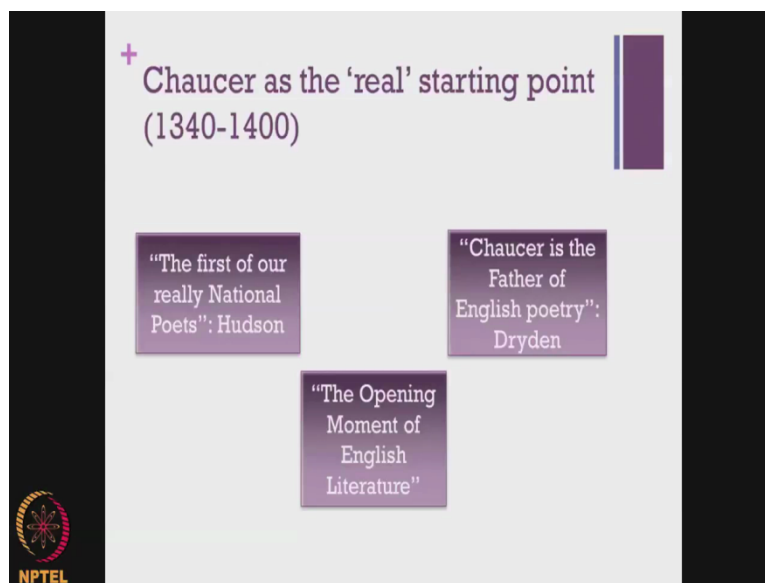


History of English Language and Literature
Professor Merin Simi Raj
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Lecture No 2
The Age of Chaucer

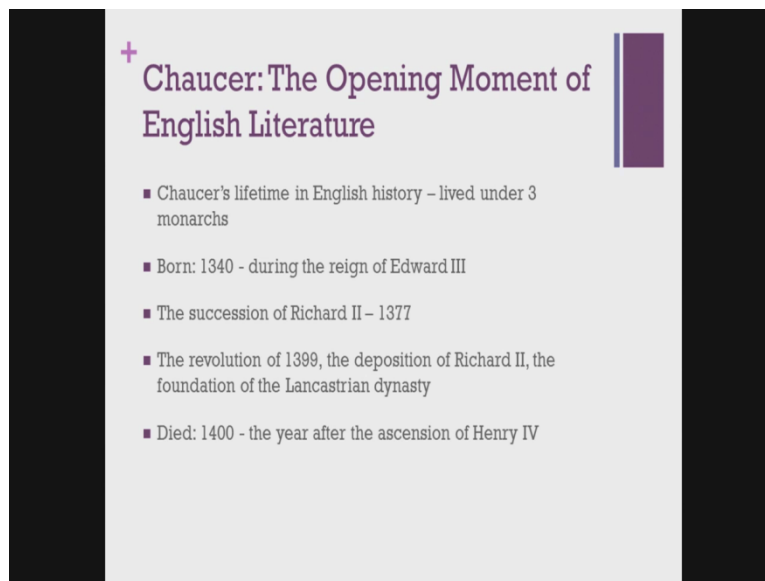
Good morning everyone and welcome to the second lecture on History of English Language and Literature. In the first introductory series, we saw development of English through ages and we also noticed what had been happening in the Anglo-Saxon period and turn of events which led to the emergence of the Middle English period.

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We also saw that though the Middle English period was quite eventful to begin with, the most noted name during this period was Chaucer, so much so that even an age was named as Age of Chaucer. Many historians as we also mentioned in the beginning, they consider Chaucer as a real starting point of English literature. Chaucer led from 1340 to...to lead till 1400. However, the entire century gets named after this massive figure, Geoffrey Chaucer. He was described as first of our really national poets and he was also considered and continues to be considered as a father of English poetry.

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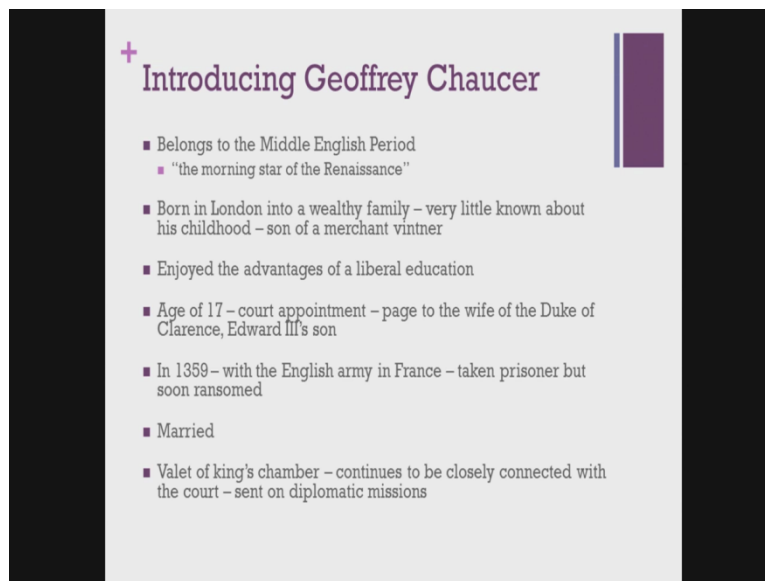
+ Chaucer: The Opening Moment of English Literature

- Chaucer's lifetime in English history – lived under 3 monarchs
- Born: 1340 - during the reign of Edward III
- The succession of Richard II – 1377
- The revolution of 1399, the deposition of Richard II, the foundation of the Lancastrian dynasty
- Died: 1400 - the year after the ascension of Henry IV

So when we look at the opening moments of English literature, it is very important to also understand the time period which Chaucer's life and time covered in terms of social history and the political history of the period? So in that sense, we begin to see that Chaucer had this rare distinction of having lived under 3 monarchs. He was born in 1340 during the reign of Edward III. And it was during his lifetime that Richard II succeeded that was in 1377.

He also witnessed two major events, the Revolution of 1399 including deposition of Richard II and also the foundation of the Lancastrian dynasty. And he dies in 1400, one year after the ascension of Henry IV. So this is a very brief introduction towards the life of Chaucer in terms of the social and political history. And moving on, if we look into a bit detail into the life of Geoffrey Chaucer, he also belonged to the Middle English period and was rightfully known as the morning star of the Renaissance.

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+ Introducing Geoffrey Chaucer

- Belongs to the Middle English Period
 - "the morning star of the Renaissance"
- Born in London into a wealthy family – very little known about his childhood – son of a merchant vintner
- Enjoyed the advantages of a liberal education
- Age of 17 – court appointment – page to the wife of the Duke of Clarence, Edward III's son
- In 1359 – with the English army in France – taken prisoner but soon ransomed
- Married
- Valet of king's chamber – continues to be closely connected with the court – sent on diplomatic missions

He was born in London; he was born into a fairly wealthy family. We know very little about his childhood, most of the details are not available. But however, we get to know that he was a son of a merchant vintner, wine merchant and he lived a fairly luxurious life to being with. And he, historians do assume that he also enjoyed the advantages of liberal education and so much so that the contacts that he made at a very young age were quite significant to begin with.

So right at the age of 17, he had his first court appointment and he was a page to the wife of the Duke of Clarence, who was also Edward III's son. And we find that by 1359, he also lives with the English army during one of their wars with France and he was even taken prisoner during that period, but we find that Edward III, he was too kind and generous towards Chaucer that he chose to ransom him with 16 pounds, 16 pounds was a huge sum in 14th century.

If we look if we compare it with the buying power of the 14th century, historians do calculate that a single pound was enough to sustain an ordinary man for about six months, half a year. So 16 pounds was a huge sum of money and that money was paid to bring back Chaucer as ransom. So we can even understand the kind of influence and the kind of life that he led so much so that even the king did care to bring him back as a ransom.

He was married too, but we do not have too many details of his domestic life. Historians have not recorded it because many of the things are not available. And he also continued to be closely connected with the court and he was often sent on diplomatic missions to France, to

Italy. So his exposure was also quite varied. He had a rather luxurious courtly life and he was sent as ambassadors to different parts of the country, different parts of the world as well.

So he got to travel a lot; that exposure really made Chaucer into the man that he was. So rightfully he was the appropriate person to begin the story of English literature with the that he had the fine measure of good exposure. He had a way in which he could articulate everything into good writing and so his writings are considered as the beginning of English literature, English literature itself.

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The slide is titled "Ups and downs in Chaucer's life" and features a list of key events in his life. The events are:

- Two diplomatic visits to Italy – influenced by the Italian culture early Renaissance – may have met Petrarch and Boccaccio
- Many royal favours – even sat in the Parliament as knight of the shire of Kent
- Overthrow of the Lancastrians**
- Chaucer's patron – John of Gaunt banished from court – almost fell into poverty
- Accession of Henry IV** (John of Gaunt's son) – grant of a royal pension – looking forward to a better life
- Dies within a year!

And there were ups and downs in Chaucer's life. We have already seen how he was sent to Italy in diplomatic missions because he was considered as a fine ambassador to negotiate with the leaders of other provinces and other countries. And he was very much influenced by the Italian culture and early Renaissance, as we know Renaissance had its early beginnings in the land of Italy.

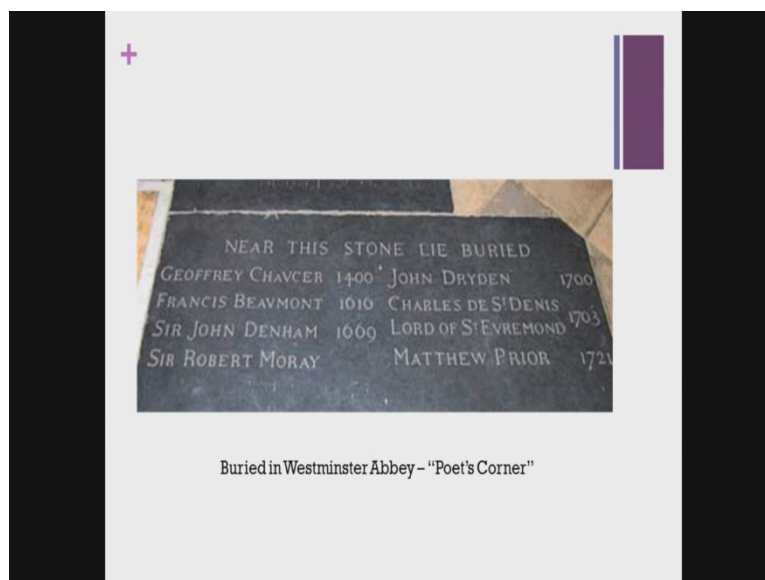
And some historians even feel that he may have met with Petrarch and Boccaccio, the leading literary writers of the period. And also he was recipient of many royal favors and it said that he even sat in the Parliament as knight of the shire of Kent. And there was brief time when his life went through a major crisis that was a period when the Lancastrian, the House of Lancastrians were overthrown from power.

And we do see that, that point of time John of Gaunt who was a major patron of Chaucer, he was banished from court for a brief period and that time he, Chaucer fell into poverty and he saw very difficult times during that period as well. So he even thought that he might end his

life in poverty as well but again the turn of events, thanks to the state of flux in which the political and social life of England was; again, we find the Lancastrians coming back to power with the accession of Henry IV who also happens to be one of John Gaunt's sons.

And with that, we find that Chaucer gets a very generous grant of royal pension. And there is assumption that perhaps he looked forward to a very comfortable life ahead. He even leased out a really big apartment in the center of the nation, but we do find that the life had other plans for him and he dies within a year of the accession of King Henry IV. So this is a very brief summary of Chaucer's life and how his life was closely connected with the social and political turn of events.

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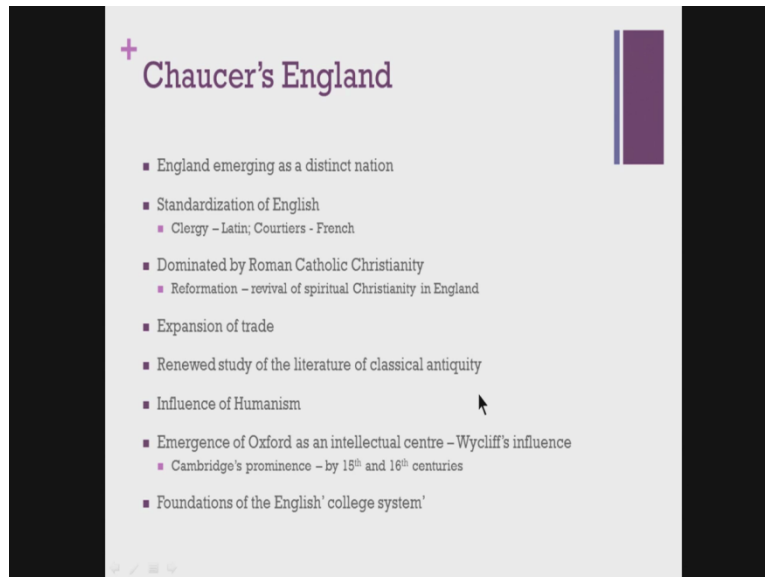


And also one important note as far as English, history of English literary is concerned; he was the first poet to be buried in Westminster Abbey, a very prestigious place. And the place in which he buried is now known as Poets' Corner and it's also much favored site for the tourist as well. It is very important to see how Chaucer's England was fashioned so that it influenced his writings and so much so that then entire period came to be known as the Age of Chaucer as well.

So social historians also preferred to call this period as Chaucer's England because it continued to influence ways in which the writing of that period was produced. And also it influenced the ways in which English literature and the general English language was beginning to get fashioned. So we also saw in the introductory session about how in the

Middle English period after the Norman Conquest, England began to emerge as a distinct nation.

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There was an increased sense of nationalism, a sense of nationhood; they began to emerge more with native influences rather than with the foreign, Italian or French influences. So we also find standardization of English language. If you remember, it was Chaucer's language and King Alfred's language, East-Midland dialect which emerged as the Standard English which continued to be used even in the contemporary.

And we also find that it was not merely English which was used in Chaucer's England, the clergy continued to use Latin which was the language of ecclesiastical power and the courtiers continued to use French language as well. French for a very long-term, in fact continued to be the language of the royalty. And it was also used in some measures in law courts until statute which came to be issued directed that English should completely replace the usage of French.

And this period, the Middle English period, Chaucer's England, especially 14th century was dominated by the Roman Catholic Christianity, the clergy enjoyed a lot of power and we also find a certain kind of revival happening within Christianity in England, a little bit of that we will be seeing in detail shortly. And there is expansion of trade as Britain consolidates itself as a nation and also understand the, understands the possibility of expanding itself in terms of land, in terms of trade, so on and so forth.

And during this period, thanks to the connection with Italy and the influences of Renaissance; from there we also find that there is a reduced interest in the literature of classical antiquity, especially literature in Greek and Rome. And there is also this influence of humanism which is connected to the emergence of Renaissance. And we find that there is a free secular spirit, a spirit of enquiry which is beginning to emerge that also qualifies much of the writing and thought of the later periods in England.

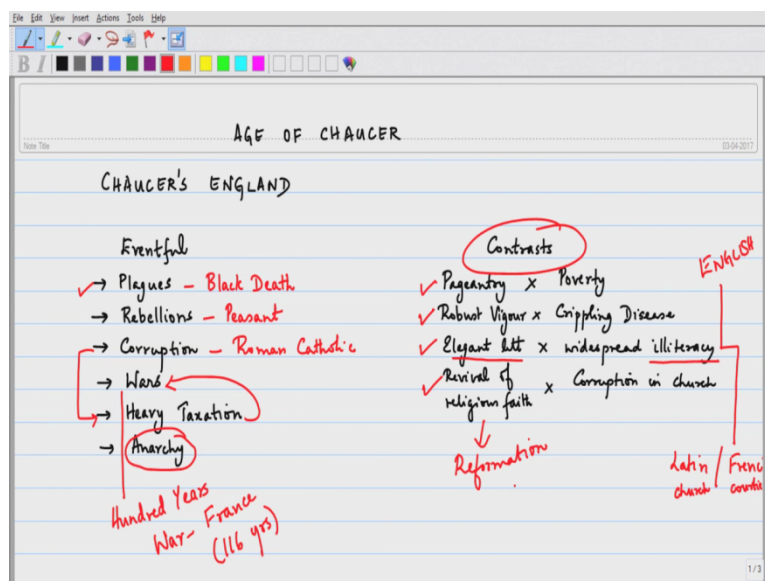
And during this period that Oxford emerges as an intellectual centre and we do see John Wycliff's major influence, major contribution in shaping Oxford into the intellectual centre that it is today. And it was only a little later by the 15th and 16th centuries that Cambridge emerges as a prominent centre as well. And this is the period which also witnessed a lot of changes in the university system.

We find that the collated system which most of the Commonwealth nations although continue to follow, the foundations of this English college system was late in during the 14th century in Chaucer's England, there are various reasons, various social political reasons that contribute to make England as one of the founding civilizations of modern period itself.

So having lived during that period, Chaucer did enjoy a lot of these advantages and in his writings also we see a reflection of this refinement, this exposure, and this increased growth that England was getting used to. Yeah, but at the same time it is very important for us to note that Chaucer also lived in a century which was very eventful.

Chaucer's England was not all about political stability, was not all about the golden the flowering period of English language and literature, it was very eventful in the political sense, in terms of other kinds of crisis, in terms of the common life people, so on and so forth. Okay, we will take a quick look at the turn of events during Chaucer's England and how it adversely affected the progress of England in the 14th and 15th century.

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We find that the England during that time, it was quite affected by plagues; mainly, we have major plague which swept through most of Europe and Britain, it was Black Death. That was quite a tragic event to begin with and there was a continuous occurrence, in fact, Britain was under the attack of the Black Death 4 times almost consecutively and that had even wiped out half the population.

The nation had to struggle a lot to deal with this crisis. There were also a lot of peasant rebellions because England was still under the feudal order and that had resulted in a lot of unrest and lot of difficulties for the peasants. There was also massive corruption mainly within the Roman Catholic Church. Yeah, in this context, it is useful to remember that there were lot of monasteries that and the other institutions at the Roman Catholic Church had established. And these were also breeding grounds for lot of corruptive activities. The common man was quite upset by the many things which were happening about the luxurious life that most of the clergy were living. And the clerks who were employed within this institution were also contributing to the corruption in many different ways.

And this was also affecting the people in another sense, in the sense that there was as heavy taxation which was imposed upon them. And the taxation was quite doubled by the effect of the wars that happen. One of the major wars that we will be taking a look at is the Hundred Years War; the war was fought with France for over 116 years though it comes to be known as the Hundred Years War. And there was prevalent anarchy because of all these things put together.

There were massive deaths, rebellion, corruption, wars, heavy taxation, the common man was not living a life of luxury like the courtiers but he was bearing the brunt of all these events put together. And in that sense, it was an age of glaring social contrast. As we would see, on the one hand there was a very lavish kind of pageantry going on and other hand, people lived in adverse poverty. There was robust vigor and good health and lot of good things happening on the one hand. On the other hand, we had death, crippling diseases, so on and so forth.

On the one hand, elegant literature such as Chaucer's and many others' had begun to flourish, which is seen as the beginning of English literature, but on the other hand, there was also widespread illiteracy. Here it is also important to note, there is some linguistic element here as well. England also had these languages such as Latin and French. As we mentioned, Latin was a language of Church, of clergy and French was a language of the courtiers.

So there was very little attention, a formal attention paid to English language in the beginning. But we do see that a lot of concerted effort went into making English language the medium of the common people and also, the Church also in certain ways, especially the activities of Reformation also paid to the emergence of English as a common language, the translations of Bible into the vernacular by John Wyclif.

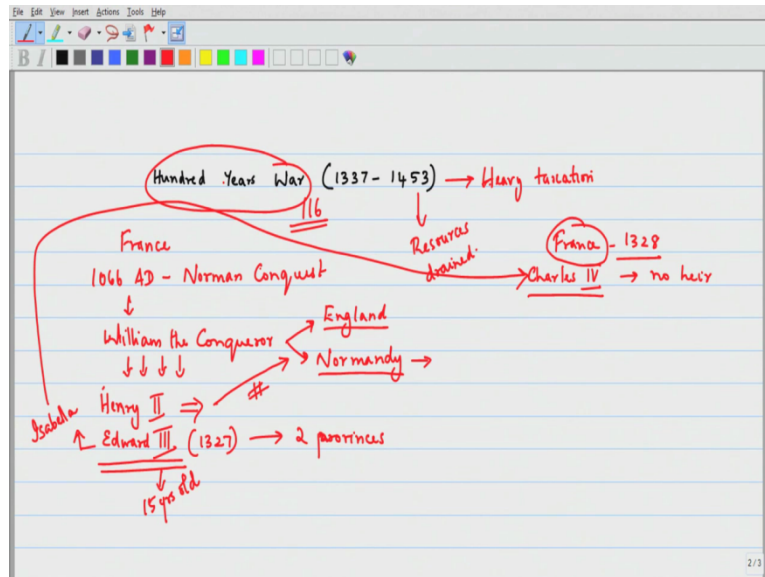
And more importantly, most of the leading writers of the period including Geoffrey Chaucer, he wrote in English making the language more, bringing the language closer to the common man as well. So coming back to our point, on the one hand, there was this emergence of elegant literature and on the other hand, there was widespread illiteracy of the common people. And also this brings this reminds us that literature and all the other reading material which was available during that period, the target audience was mainly the courtiers, and the nobles and the clergy and that was very little available for the common man as such.

Yeah and also, fourthly on the one hand, there was this revival of religious faith which happened; it was also known as Reformation. A more detailed study of social history will take us into the specific details of this event which swept across Europe and Britain in the 14th and 15th century, which also laid a proper cultural foundation to the England which was set to begin on a golden period from the 16th century onwards.

And on the other hand, there was widespread corruption in Church which was leading to a whole lot of hostility and lot of disgruntled feelings among the people, yeah. And as we mentioned, earlier the wars were contributing in a tremendous way to the general peace and

general life of England in many ways. So we need to take a look at the Hundred Years War which qualifies to be one of the major sources of heavy taxation, it also heavily drained the resources of England.

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This makes it important for us to understand the trajectory of this war which was spread over 116 years, a little more than 100 years though for convenience, historians have chosen to name it as a Hundred Years War. The origins of this contest with France; it dates back to 1066 AD, if you remember that was when the Norman Conquest happened. So then William the Conqueror who led the Norman Conquest against the English, against the Anglo-Saxons and won over them, he ended up ruling England and Normandy in France together.

There was the island of England on one hand and Normandy in France on the other. So all the subsequent kings of England, they all the successors continued to rule England and Normandy simultaneously and it was seen as quite a rightful claim as well. Also, we notice that from the time of Henry II, this lot of territorial disputes which emerge and it also becomes a little difficult to control the land which is situated in a distance land, in a distant land.

And around the same period, this difficulty in controlling the land leads to a lot of territorial disputes between England and France leading to a lot of hostile emotions as well. And if you remember, it is around the same period, in the 14th and 15th century that England also in England, French also begins to lose its prominence and loses out to the English language. So

lots of factors contribute to this hostility and this becomes a triggering factor to contribute towards a war-like situation as well.

And what happens by the reign of Edward the III is quite significant, we find that by 1327, compared to the entire land of Normandy, there are only two provinces left in France under the control of England. This is a major source of concern as the source of revenue was also getting limited and also the the English kings begin to take it as a matter of prestige, as a matter of honor. And around the same time we find that in France, another turn of events are happening.

So this is France in 1328, so in 1328 in France, King Charles IV, he dies and there is no heir and Edward III is the king of England during this period. And Edward III's mother who is Isabella, Isabella happens to be Charles IV's sister. So Edward III's mother, Isabella assumes that since Charles IV has died leaving no heir as a successor, they assume that there is a rightful claim for Edward III that we also should remember that he was only 15 years old then, yeah.

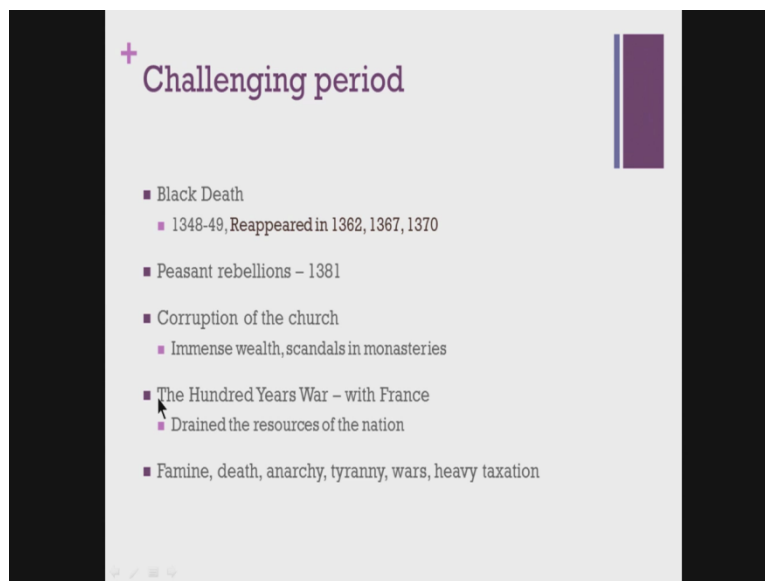
So Edward III and his mother, they assume that there is a rightful claim for Edward III to the crown for France, so they lay a claim to the English king Edward III who happens to be the nephew of the deceased king, Charles IV. He lays a claim to the crown of France which is not taken very kindly by the French people because they had other plans in hand. And they also there is this rule which prevails in France that one can become king only through their father's line and not through their mother's line.

But in England, one can become king through either way, through the father's line or through the mother's line. So because of this, the French people are very unhappy with Edward III accessing the crown of France. And with this, kind of dispute emerges and France in general was against this and they bring in a new king and the Hundred Years War, we find it breaks out. And it was at this point of time that the Hundred Years War breaks out between England and France.

And to be noted, this was not a single series of war happening, it was not a single war which happened between England and France; in fact, it was a series of wars, a series of battles which happened. And there was in the initial period, victory was mostly on the English side, but eventually it happen so that France wins over. And even the two provinces which were held by Britain, they lose out on those two provinces by 1453, by the end of the war.

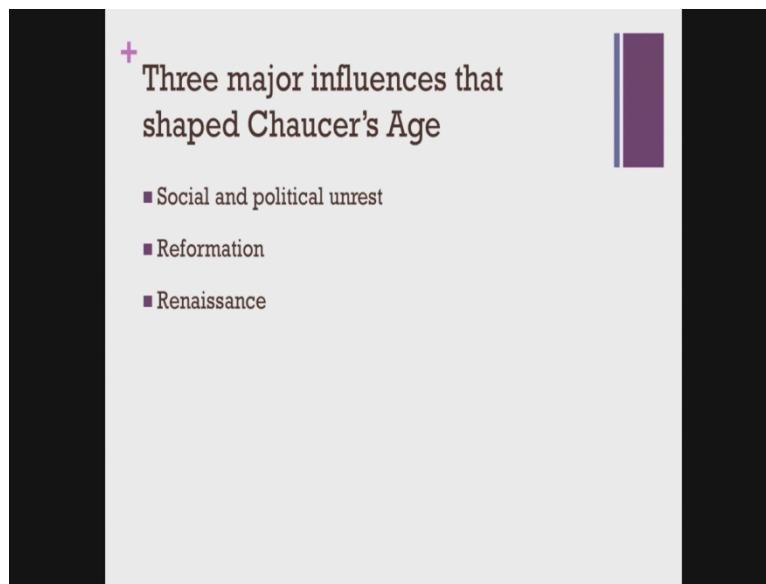
We shall not be getting into further details of the Hundred Years War, but some of the details we shall be taking a look at again when we engage with the 15th century because a war is spread over such a long time that it continues to inform the ways in which social, political history of Britain was formed. So coming back to our original point, due to the various things happening especially as the age was dominated by war, the general mood of 14th century, it was not very favorable for the common man.

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But in spite of that, we do find that Chaucer continues to write and he gets qualified as the father of English literature itself. So this is how we sum up the challenging period of 13th and 14th century. There was famine, there was death, anarchy, tyranny, wars, heavy taxation and you name it and you have it. It was such a challenging period for Britain. And if we just try to sum up this age, there were three major influences that shaped Chaucer's age.

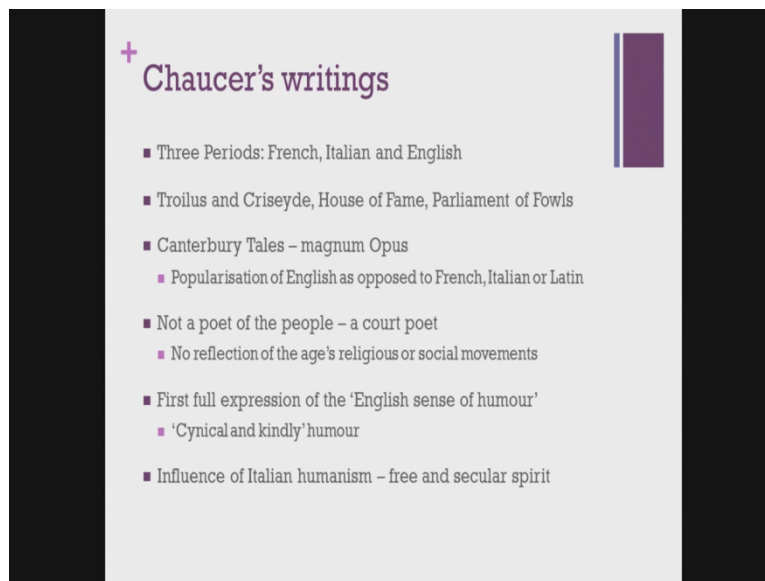
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There was social and political unrest, there was reformation happening at the religious site with a reformation happening within the Roman Catholic Church and also Christianity in general. There was also this major influence of Renaissance, so Chaucer's writings also we can see a reflection of all of these things happening in Chaucer's writings though he was not entirely a poet of the people, he was mostly a court poet, we shall be coming to that in a short while.

And before that, it is important to note that Chaucer's writings can be divided into three different periods; there was a French period, and Italian period and English period. During the French and Italian period, we find that the Chaucer was heavily influenced by the writers of France, by the writers from Italy and also a major influence of the Renaissance ideals were also got into his writing, his thought processes, the way in which his writings were structured, the metrical schemes that he used, the alliterations that he used, so on and so forth.

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+ Chaucer's writings

- Three Periods: French, Italian and English
- Troilus and Criseyde, House of Fame, Parliament of Fowls
- Canterbury Tales – magnum Opus
 - Popularisation of English as opposed to French, Italian or Latin
- Not a poet of the people – a court poet
 - No reflection of the age's religious or social movements
- First full expression of the 'English sense of humour'
 - 'Cynical and kindly' humour
- Influence of Italian humanism – free and secular spirit

Some of his major works include Troilus and Criseyde, House of Fame and Parliament of Fowls, but his magnum opus was certainly Canterbury Tales. This was during a time when English language was vying with French and Italian and Latin. And we also find that Canterbury Tales, in terms of English language studies and literary studies, it led to the standardization of English language and also to the popularization of the language.

And significantly though a lot of things were happening in the 14th century, though the century was quite eventful, not just in terms of social political unrest also in terms of the major crisis and the major turn of events that went through the century, Chaucer's writings were quite removed from the realities of the time, in the sense that he continued to be influenced by all these happenings in and around him but his writings for say, we cannot find a reflection of the times. That was primarily because he was not a poet of the people, he was a court poet, he wrote for the courtiers.

His influences were primarily surrounded by all courtly influences. So there was very little connection that he had with the ordinary people though he knew the people through his travels, through the various kinds of, various kinds of offices that he held, the various ways in which he could interact as an as a bureaucratic officer. But other than that, his life was primarily surrounded by courtiers and there was a way in which he could stay away, he could afford to stay away from the major religious and social movements of the period.

And we also find that in his writings, what makes his writings very significant is that many historians and the literary critics of the later period, they feel that it was in his work that the

first full expression of the English sense of humor was found. As one of the historians would describe it, English sense of humor was partly cynical and mostly kindly. So it has its origins in Chaucer's writings and Chaucer's expressions.

And we find that Chaucer was heavily influenced by the Italian humanism. So though he belonged to the courtly class, though there was a way in which he was removed from the ground realities of the society, he was inspired by the free and secular spirit which was contributed by the Italian humanism and also the various of the Renaissance's ideas. So this had led to a lot of freeness in his writings and a lot of general liberalism in his writings as well, yeah.

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+ **Canterbury Tales**

- A unfinished collection of 24 comic and moral stories told by a group of Pilgrims – to the shrine of St. Thomas Beckett at Canterbury
- Presented as a story-telling contest – prize, a free meal at Tabard Inn, Southwark
 - A story within a story
- Snapshots of the Age – a sense of medieval life through a range of characters (portrait and story of each pilgrim)
 - The Old Feudal order – Knight, Squire, Yeoman, Plowman
 - The Merchant class – Merchant, Man of Law, Guildsmen, Cook
 - The ecclesiastical class – Prioress, Monk, Friar, Pardoner
 - Entertaining and open to a range of interpretations
- A literary tour
 - Romances – The Wife of Bath's tale
 - Fabliaux – The Miller's Tale
 - The stories of saint's lives, sermons – The Parson's Tale
 - Allegories – The Pardoner's Tale

Published in 1478 – Caxton's Printing Press

So we need to take a very detailed look at Canterbury Tales which is the magnum opus of Chaucer and also the defining work that inaugurated English literature in many different ways. If we try to summarize Canterbury Tales, it is an unfinished collection of 24 comic and moral stories; it was a set of stories told by a group of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas Beckett at Canterbury. This was structured in such a way that it was a story within a story.

There is this major framework of story happening which is the travel of a certain set of characters to the shrine of St. Thomas Beckett. And they decide to tell a story on the way, two stories on the way and two on their way back, and in order to keep them out of boredom and also to keep each other company. And they also decide that the best story teller will get a free meal at Tabard Inn; that is from where they began their journey.

So this main story and this is a main story and within the framework of this main story, there are these different tales which are being told by different characters in Canterbury Tales. So this is in fact, a story within a story, the structure is in such a way. So this Canterbury Tales though it is written by Chaucer who was a courtly figure, we get snapshots of the age in very different ways. We get a sense of the medieval life through a range of characters that he portrayed for us.

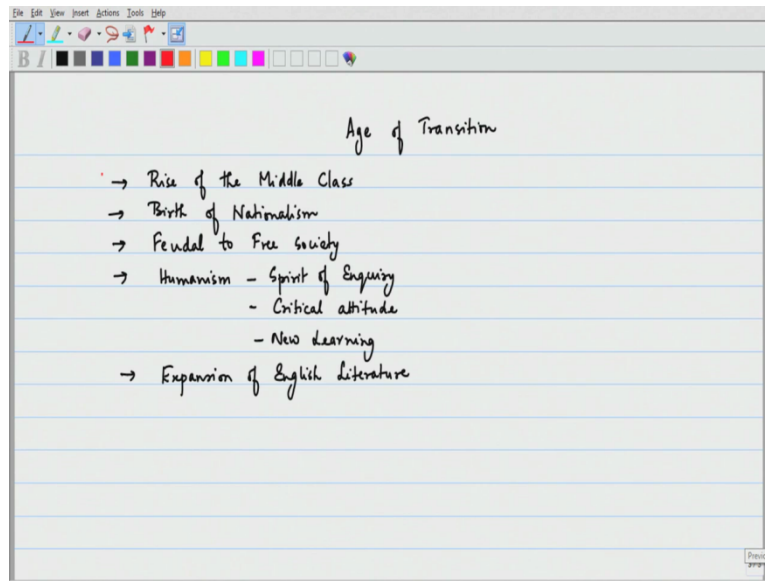
In fact, this is the most elaborate and the most extensive kind of portrait of the medieval period in that sense. We have for instance certain characters from the old feudal order including the knights, squire, yeoman and plowman. From the merchant class, there is the character of the merchant, the man of law, guildsman and the cook. From the ecclesiastical class or from the clergy, we have prioress, the monk, a friar and the pardoner, and each one of them; they have a different tale to tell.

And all these tales interestingly are very entertaining, it is hilarious and it is open to a range of interpretations. And it is in these ways that we find the exemplary skill of Chaucer, the man because we do see that. Though he was apparently removed from the harsh realities of 14th century, his tales reflect that he did have a sound knowledge of what was happening in and around him. And also the entire work is structured and fashioned in such a way that it continues to hold the interest of many critics and historians even in the contemporary.

And for someone who is very interested in the studies of literary, the studies of how English literary studies evolved, this Canterbury Tales also present an interesting literary too. Though this is as early as the 14th century when many of different genres of writing had not yet begun to emerge, we get a literary to a fairly extensive tour, through different forms of writing such as romances, fabliau and there are these occasions where stories of saints' lives are retold, there are allegories.

So many ways, it is a wonderful treat for any student of literature when they begin their studies. And this work, Canterbury Tales, it was written over a span of time during Chaucer's lifetime but it was properly published only in 1478 after Caxton's printing press was installed in England. So it was quite fortunate that unlike the many other takes of the Old English period, Canterbury Tales was not lost or forgotten, but it was preserved quite well into the posterity, thanks to the techniques of printing that emerged in Britain during the time.

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Having said that, the 14th century was also an age of transition in many different ways; even while the writing of English literature was getting consolidated in 14th century, there were many other events which contributed to the consolidation of English language and literature. For instance, it is during this period that we see the rise of the middle class. We see the rise of the middle class, the birth of nationalism, the transition from feudal to free society and more importantly the emergence of humanism which fostered spirit of enquiry, a questioning attitude, a critical attitude, a lot of enthusiasm for new learning and very importantly the expansion of English literature as well.

So when we say that a lot of things were happening during this period, it would be quite natural to expect a little more than Chaucer out of this period because this was in many ways a fertile ground for the emergence of new languages, new literatures. So it was only quite natural that there were other poets also who wrote during this period. However, it is just a happy accident of history that Chaucer gained prominence over all the other writers.

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The slide features a purple plus sign icon and a purple vertical bar on the right side. The text is as follows:

+ Other poets of Chaucer's Age

- John Gower (1322-1408)
 - about the unstable state of contemporary English literature, a gloomy view of the social conditions of the time
 - frequent and severe criticism of the clergy
 - sympathetic to the teachings of Wyclif and his followers
 - could not make up his mind concerning the best medium - French, Latin or English?
- William Langland- *The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman* - the first provincial work in English
 - to expose the sloth and vice of the Church, to set on record the struggles and virtues of common folks
 - completes Chaucer's picture of 14th century England - same Age producing different pictures of the society
- John Barbour - Father of Scottish poetry
- Bruce (1375) - a history of Scotland's struggle for freedom

So this is not the time for us to evaluate or to critically engage with why certain writers gain more prominence over the others in literary history, but we do note that they were other writers during this time, especially, poets such as John Gower and William Langland. And they were quite different from Chaucer, none of them had stately positions and they were not really court poets to begin with.

And John Gower in fact, he wrote a lot about the unstable state of contemporary English literature and he also presented unlike Chaucer gloomy view of the social conditions of the time. He was quite aware of the challenges that the age was going through. And we do see a very severe criticism of the clergy in his writing; this was something that Chaucer hardly engaged with. In *Canterbury Tales*, we do find a satirical way through which Chaucer tries to critique but we do not find any open criticism in Chaucer's writings.

But John Gower was quite open about his criticism and he is also sympathetic to the teachings of Wycliff and his followers. Reformation was entirely spearheaded by Wycliff in England and his significance is quite noted by social historians. But in Chaucer, we do not find much of a reflection of the spirit of reformation. On the other hand, and poets such as John Gower's and William Langland's writing, there is a way in which we find that the ideals of Reformation had contributed a lot to the emergence of literature.

But John Gower lost out in certain ways because he did not write entirely in English. He was one of those many writers who could not make his mind concerning the best medium, because if you think about those times, in 13th, 14th and 15th century was a period of transition and

there was no way in which one could predict which language would have dominance in the preceding, in the following times.

So Chaucer was perhaps more insightful and had better foresight or perhaps he was just fortunate to have written all his works mostly in English. But there were a lot of writers like John Gower who were still writing in many different languages at the same time, in French, Italian, Latin and also in English. So because of that, we have little access to the works of John Gower written in languages other than English because they were not included in the proper tradition of English literary studies.

And there was William Langland whose work, *The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman*, it was considered almost par with *Canterbury Tales*, except that he gave a very different view of England. And many historians feel Langland's writings complement *Canterbury Tales* and Chaucer's writings quite well. Langland's work is considered as a first provincial work in English. And also he had (1376) exposed the sloth and vice of the Church and he sets on record the struggles and the virtues of the common man, which is something that is severely lacking in Chaucer's works. And there is a lot of critical work available on the ways in which Chaucer and Langland presents the medieval age in very different ways.

Our purpose here is not to judge or evaluate them but to see them for their literary merit as well as for the ways in which they have contributed, they worked as a mirror of those times to help us understand how writers positioned in different locations, different historical and political locations, looked at different ages and how each age was represented as well.

And this also gives us a sense of how the same age producing writers of different caliber and writers who look at the spirit of the times in very different ways. And there is also John Barbour who is considered as father of Scottish poetry. His work, *Bruce*, in 1375, that is considered as a history of Scotland's struggle for freedom; and it is considered as a seminal work which even later on brings together these different but related histories in the larger scheme of literary studies.

And there is very limited prose during Chaucer's age, medieval age in fact, poetry was beginning to flourish, poetry was thriving but just as in the Anglo-Saxon period and the Old English period, prose had very little to contribute in terms of literature. It was merely functional in a sense that prose was used to communicate but it had not yet come up to the

level of literature as we understand literature today. And Chaucer also wrote a lot of prose but very little has been included as literature and compared to umm Canterbury Tales, his poetic work; most of them do not even stand a chance.

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And very important work during this period was perhaps Wycliff's translation of the entire Bible from Latin to English. This had a huge influence in the 14th and in the subsequent centuries because until then the Bible was far removed from the common man and it was only accessible to the clergy. The interpretations were available only with the clergy; they almost held a monopoly over Bible.

So Wycliff's translations, it was quite revolutionary in that sense, it brought religion closer to the common man and also ensured that religion does not remain as a monopoly of the Church or of the clergy. And those for those of who are more interested in knowing about the social and religious history of the time, it would be very useful to read up little more on Wycliff and also on Reformation. In fact, Wycliff's influence was so widespread that his pamphlets which were mostly controversial they even led to a lot of crises within the Oxford University.

He was in fact, charged for lot of such controversial charges as well. But in the end, and as far as language and literature is concerned, his writings were very useful in showing the power of vernacular for theological discussions, to show that English language can lend itself to not just imaginative literature, not just (())(37:54) literature but also it is useful for carrying out powerful and serious theological discussions.

And the other work which has lived on to the posterity is “The Travels of Sir John Maundeville”, whose authorship remains contested and there are different theories about this work which was hugely popular during that period and some of the historians feel that it could be a compilation of many interesting and imaginative stories translated from French, however, it continues to be considered as the first English prose classic available though the authorship is quite contested.

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And moving on to the century soon after, in fact, the Chaucer's influence was so tremendous that the 13th century gets branded as the period, the century before Chaucer and the 15th century gets branded as a period after Chaucer. Chaucer becomes a defining way in which literature begins to be defined, shaped and even spoken about centuries later. The 15th century after Chaucer, it was quite barren in terms of literary output. However, it remained very significant as a preparatory period taking us to the golden period of the 16th century, the Elizabeth era.

So in the next lecture, we will be taking a look at how the 15th century gets designated as a preparatory period for this golden period to follow and also we will be taking a look in detail some of the social political and literary ways in which the 15th century was fashioned, Thank you for listening.