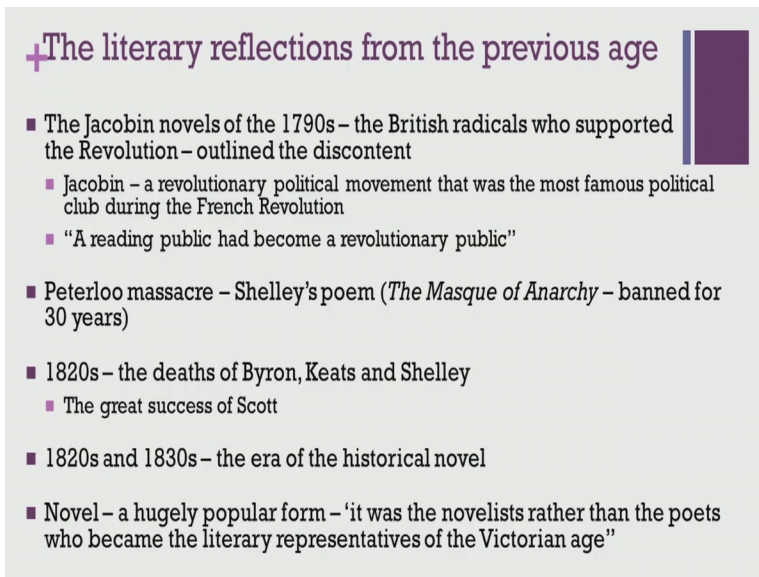


**Course on History of English Language and Literature**  
**By Dr. Merin Simi Raj**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**  
**Lecture 19**  
**The Age of Tennyson: Victorian Era**

Good morning everyone let me welcome you again to the NPTEL course the history of English language and literature. Today's lecture is titled the age of Tennyson or the Victorian era so just like we had been taking a look at various literary ages from the beginning onwards we noticed that these eras could be meant in different ways, it could be either based on the most representative right of the period like we are doing here the age of Tennyson it could also be with the reigning monarch of those times like the Elizabethan era or the Victorian era in this case.

(Refer Slide Time: 0:47)



**+**The literary reflections from the previous age

- The Jacobin novels of the 1790s – the British radicals who supported the Revolution – outlined the discontent
  - Jacobin – a revolutionary political movement that was the most famous political club during the French Revolution
  - “A reading public had become a revolutionary public”
- Peterloo massacre – Shelley’s poem (*The Masque of Anarchy* – banned for 30 years)
- 1820s – the deaths of Byron, Keats and Shelley
  - The great success of Scott
- 1820s and 1830s – the era of the historical novel
- Novel – a hugely popular form – ‘it was the novelists rather than the poets who became the literary representatives of the Victorian age’

So at the outset keeping in tune with the mode of our lecture we begin looking at the literary reflections from the previous age in which we also find a continuation towards the present Victorian age. The previous age romantic age was dominated by revolutionary spirit we do find that though us certain conservative reactions settle in England at the later revolutionary fist we find that the revolutionary spirit had not completely left the English writing or reading public.

So in that sense from the later 18th century onwards a certain a sense of Victorian spirit had begun to set in particularly with the Jacobin novels of the 1790s, it was a set of writers known as a British radicals who supported the revolution, so from that time onwards a certain discontent was getting outlined and this we eventually found a definite shape in the Victorian era. It is perhaps too early to identify these connections from the late 18th century towards the Victorian era but however it is quite interesting to note that from the romantic period onwards and in fact from the pre romantic period onwards towards the modern period there is a strain of continuity which can be identified not just in the literary movements but also in the socio political and historical (( ))(2:01) of world history itself.

Instantly in case we missed stating it in one of the earlier sessions Jacobin was a revolutionary political movement that was a most famous political club also during the French revolution. And during this period due to the anxieties of the revolutionary spirit and also the after mart of the French revolution a sense prevailed within Britain that a reigning public had become a revolutionary public. So the revolutionary movement was no longer the priority or the prerogative of a selected few the entire reading public seem to celebrate this spirit and also participated in it though in a quite a passive way.

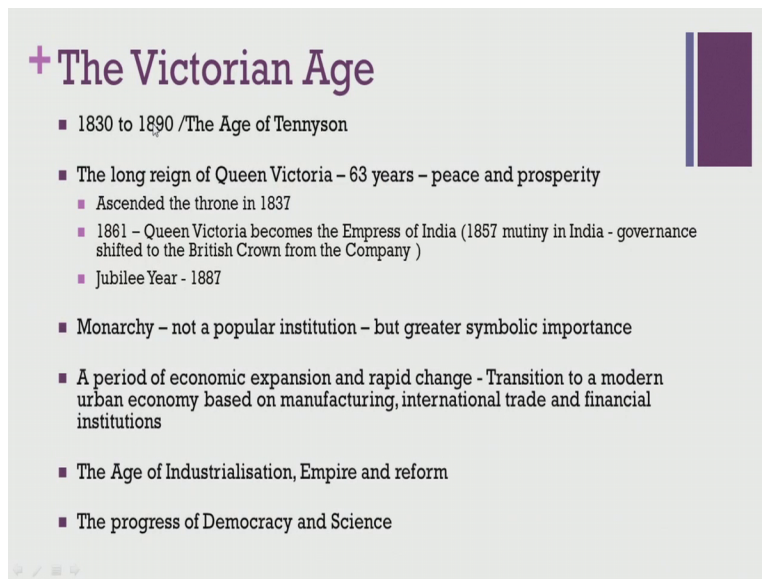
In for instance there where quite a few writers who respond to this new spirit and also found much recognition among the reading public, for example Shelley's poem based on the Peterloo massacre a title The masque of Anarchy it was banned for about 30 years but irrespective of that it did find acceptance eventually when it was more popular and more accepted. Talking about the 19th century it was characterize by a multiple turn of events which could be more literary than perhaps political and social.

In the 1820s as we have noticed the decade was dominant by the deaths of Byron, Keats and Shelley but however this major lack was in certain way or the other covered by the major literary success that Walter Scott began to enjoy with his fiction and the 1820s and 1830s in that since was also the era of the historical novel. So towards the end of the romantic age we find a transition towards a Victorian period and specially this is noticeable in the way in which particular genres where getting more dominant than the other and novel towards the end of the romantic period we noticed that it became hugely popular than all the other forms of writing and

it would perhaps suffice to say that it was a novelists rather than the poets who became the literary representatives of the Victorian age.

So at the outset itself we begin with this understanding that just like the romantic period was severely dominated by the romantic poets the Victorian period was dominated by the Victorian novel.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:10)



**+ The Victorian Age**

- 1830 to 1890 /The Age of Tennyson
- The long reign of Queen Victoria – 63 years – peace and prosperity
  - Ascended the throne in 1837
  - 1861 – Queen Victoria becomes the Empress of India (1857 mutiny in India - governance shifted to the British Crown from the Company )
  - Jubilee Year - 1887
- Monarchy – not a popular institution – but greater symbolic importance
- A period of economic expansion and rapid change - Transition to a modern urban economy based on manufacturing, international trade and financial institutions
- The Age of Industrialisation, Empire and reform
- The progress of Democracy and Science

If we try to classify the Victorian age it is a period which lasted from 1830 to 1890 this is as we have done always a very loose description of the period this is a same set of years that also get designated as age of Tennyson but interestingly this literary period coincides with the rule of a Queen Victoria who reigns perhaps the longest for 63 years and this period was characterized by peace and prosperity and there was also a sweeping changes which Britain was undergoing in the during the reign of Queen Victoria.

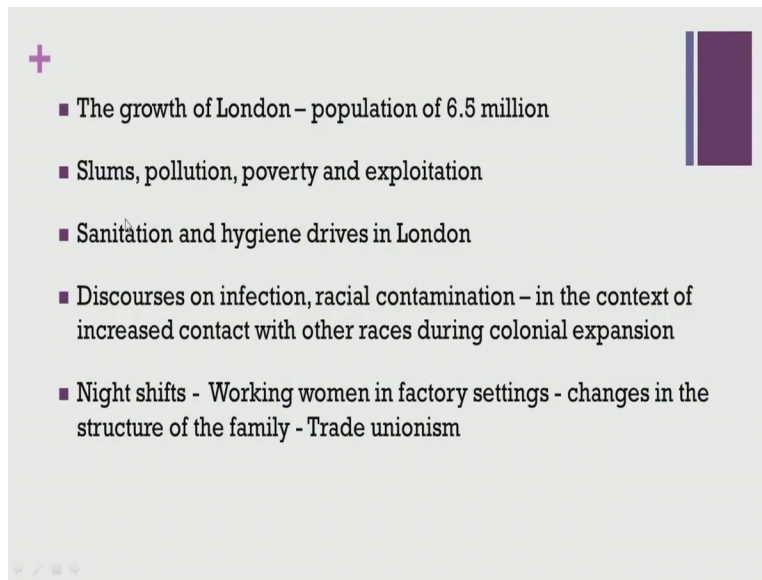
Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 but however the beginning of the age Tennyson could be identified as the year of 1830. In 1861 Queen Victoria became the empress of India this was a very significant colonial moment this was followed by the 1857 mutiny and the unrest that followed in the colonial provinces of India and during this time we also find governance shifting from the east India company to the British crown.

So this marked the very momentous transition in the colonial system of governance as well. Though Queen Victoria rules till 1901 generally the age of Tennyson has said to come to an end by 1887 which also marked the jubilee year of Queen Victoria. During the reign of Queen Victoria politically England had been undergoing a lot of transition and lot of changes so this is not an age which really celebrated the powers of the monarchy in fact monarchy was no longer a popular institution as far as the British people were concerned but however due to the increased colonial significance that British empire began to enjoy across the world the monarchy began to enjoy a greater symbolic importance we do not find the British people trying to topple their government or try to depose the monarchs a power but there is a sense that a growing sense that the monarchs power is inherently limited.

And since Britain had already undergone many changes in terms of transition from absolutist monarchy to a more parliamentary form of governments we do not find any of the following monarchs we under the illusion of ruling as an absolute monarch. So whatever had happened in France and also the other neighboring states in terms of revolution only reinforced British ideas about limited monarchy.

In the Victorian age we find Britain undergoing a period of economic expansion and rapid change. During this time that the British economy also transitioned itself towards a modern urban economy based on manufacturing, international trade and financial institutions. So all together it is appropriate to note that this was an age of industrialization, empire and reform and if one could identify two major proponents which were triggering all of these developments one could say that one it was the progress of democracy and to the progress of science. So whatever it had happening during this period it could be clubbed together under either of these seminal events the progress of democracy and the progress of science. We find that the literature of this period also reflecting all of these sweeping changes which were dominating in the fields of democracy and science.

(Refer Slide Time: 7:33)



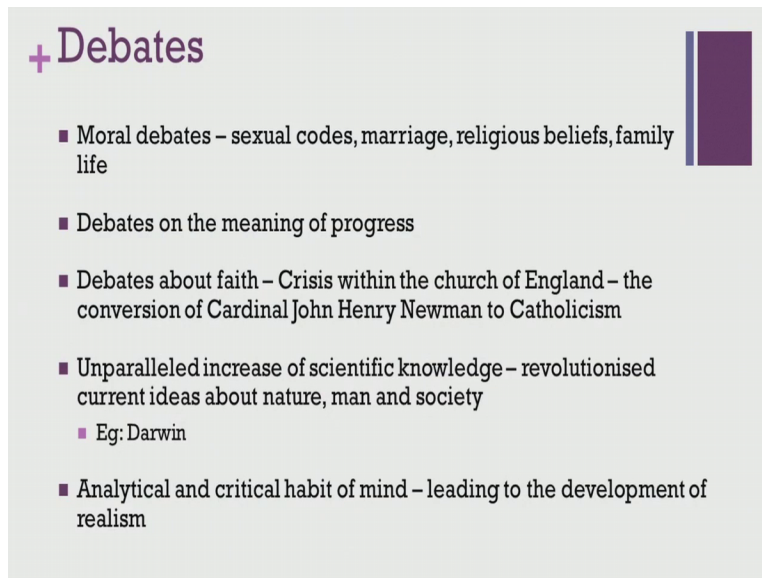
London continues to function as the most important city in England and we also find that London grows immensely and expansive during this time the population grows to a greater height from 2 million to 6.5 million during the Victorian age. And we also witness a mushrooming of slums that is also increased pollution and poverty and needless to say exploitation of the working class also followed. Sanitation was a problem that London had been struggling from the medieval times onwards we noticed it when we discussed the black teeth and the many trouble certain suits.

We find that even in the Victorian period as the population is increasing we find London struggling again with issues of sanitation and hygiene. The government and the monarch also tries to implement lot of new majors and also there are lot of hygiene drives which happen in London. It also had had another colonial implication there where lot of discourses on infection and racial contamination given that the context was that of an increased contact with other races during this colonial expansion.

So we find a lot of literary writers also responding to this there was also this general assumptions that England was getting more infected and more effected because of their contact with inferior races how are also colonized under Britain. The transition within Britain towards a more industrialized economy affected its families structure as well we find more men and women working day and night and the factories particularly the night shifts and the structure of the

working population it began to affect the family structure as well and we noticed that the presence of the working women in the factory settings it was to alter the structure of family in England perhaps forever this was also the time which witnessed the emergence of the off trade unionism in order to bring in a some kind of a work life balance and the life of the working class.

(Refer Slide Time: 9:20)



## + Debates

- Moral debates – sexual codes, marriage, religious beliefs, family life
- Debates on the meaning of progress
- Debates about faith – Crisis within the church of England – the conversion of Cardinal John Henry Newman to Catholicism
- Unparalleled increase of scientific knowledge – revolutionised current ideas about nature, man and society
  - Eg: Darwin
- Analytical and critical habit of mind – leading to the development of realism

This period also saw the emergence of various forms of debate and the intellectual circles in London and also in other parts of England, the most important of these were the more moral debates which dominated the period it was about various discussions on the sexual codes to be followed, the appropriate kind of the marriage or the appropriate religious beliefs to be followed and in general there was lot of discussion about the kind of morality that should be part of family like in general.

We also find the people in England debating more and more about the meaning and the idea of progress this happened because the idea of progress became more complex than ever it was not just about an economic advancement it was also about advancing at the cost of certain others who were actually running the economy and this was the time when the rights of the working class began to assume a new kind of importance and also with this increased realization that with colonization and with industrialization there were a few people who were paying the price for England advance economically scientifically and also politically.

And this was followed by a number of debates on faith later when we talk about the Victorian poetry will also begin to realize that this forms this center concern of most of the Victorian poets there were also a crisis that followed within the church of England and particularly this was accentuated by the conversion of Cardinal John Henry Newman to Catholicism it also useful to again recall that England was primarily a protestant country after the English reformation.

So when we talk about the debates regarding faith there were also a debate between faith and science and faith and reason all of a sudden the theocentric world view was no longer the only world view available it was been heavily contested by the penetrative inventions made from the scientific will and also from the interventions from the rational arguments. This period witnessed unparalleled increased in scientific knowledge in fact many of the inventions of this period and many of the new ideas of this period began to challenge and revolutionaries the ideas about man, nature and society.

For instance we can find this particularly in the ideas of revolution put forward by Darwin and we all know that it was to change the basis of understanding of faith, order and the ideas of man forever perhaps. All together all of these turn of events together where leading to the emergence of analytical and critical habit of mind and this also lead to the development of realism in literature.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:41)

## +An advanced Britain

- Industrialisation, growing markets, reinvestments in other manufacturing developments
- Centre of the philosophy of Free Trade, new technology, continuing industrial inventions
  - “the country became the workshop of the world” (Routledge)
- The world’s banker from 1870s onwards
- The invention of steam power – fast railways and ships, printing presses, industrial looms, agricultural machinery
- Postal service, the invention of telephone – communications improved
  - “We have been living, as it were, the life of three hundred years in thirty”
- Optimism, positivism – also, paradoxes and uncertainties

It will not be wrong to say that in Victorian England we began to see a more advanced nation so this could be attributed primarily to the forces of industrialization and also to the growing markets and we also find England making very smart and vice economic investments by investing in other manufacturing developments using the revenue that they generated from the industrialized economy.

We also find England following quite actively the philosophy of free trade or the theory of (()) (12:05) and accordingly there is also an importance of placed on new technology and continuing industrial inventions. Routledge history of literature points out that during this phase the country became the workshop of the world. So England becomes a leading colonial empire and also the most important nation in terms of advanced discovery and also the advanced scientific practices.

And we also find London transitioning itself towards being the world's banker from the 1870s onwards this in fact consolidates London's and England's superstition as a world of power from the late 19 century onwards. There were certain particular kind of scientific inventions which were to alter the history of Britain for ever it also change the way in which future scientific technology could take the nation forward.

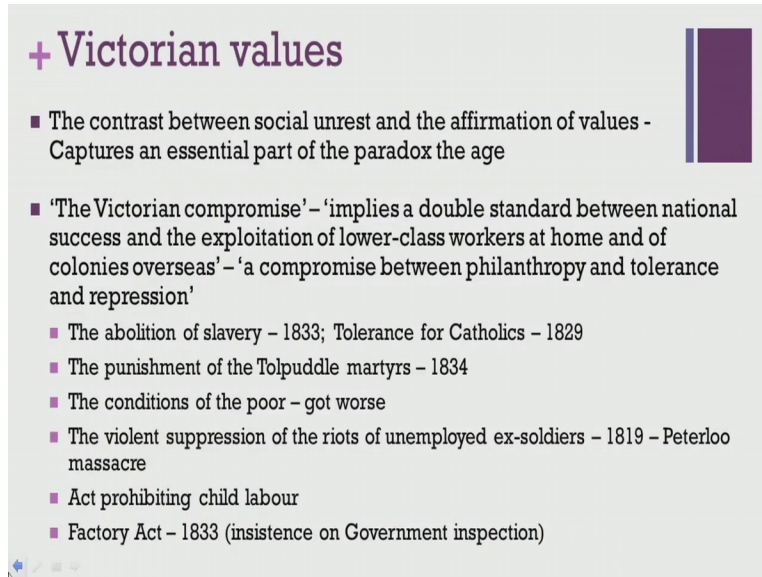
The most important one was invention of steam power, so it in fact lead to the emergence of fast railways and ships and also to the revolutionizing in the process of printing presses we also find a number of industrial looms coming up, we overall find even the agriculture of the nation relaying heavily on machinery. So the transition becomes almost complete by the end of the 19th century with the postal service and the invention of telephone, we also find there is an increased communication facility available across the length and breadth of the country and during this time it also forces to some of them to believe that we have been living as it where the life of 300 years in thirty.

So these thirty years in fact mark a significant time of progress in the history of Britain and it also began to reflect in the ways in which they were conducting there colonial governments and some of these developments and advancements we know it also spelled over to colonial provinces. So all together England was one of the leading powers and they were also leading the world towards a better economy condition and also towards a better scientific condition.



It would not be exaggeration if we say that this was an age of optimism and positivism, however want to not lose sight of the fact that this was also an age of paradoxes and uncertainties.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:10)



### + Victorian values

- The contrast between social unrest and the affirmation of values - Captures an essential part of the paradox the age
- 'The Victorian compromise' - 'implies a double standard between national success and the exploitation of lower-class workers at home and of colonies overseas' - 'a compromise between philanthropy and tolerance and repression'
  - The abolition of slavery - 1833; Tolerance for Catholics - 1829
  - The punishment of the Tolpuddle martyrs - 1834
  - The conditions of the poor - got worse
  - The violent suppression of the riots of unemployed ex-soldiers - 1819 - Peterloo massacre
  - Act prohibiting child labour
  - Factory Act - 1833 (insistence on Government inspection)

Part of this paradoxes and uncertainties were caused by what we now understand as the predominance of Victorian values. There was a contrast between social unrest and the affirmation of what we now understand as a Victorian values and this in fact the understanding of this contrast lies the central paradox of the age itself.

So before that it is useful to take a look at this particular term which was coined during the 19th century the Victorian compromise if you try to attempt a very simple definition of this this compromise implies a double standard between national success and the exploitation of lower class workers at home and of colonies overseas. So this central paradox in which also took the nation forward it became the most important impetuous which gave rise to a lot of dilemma for the writers and thinkers of this time.

While many were quite happy with the colonial strides that the nation was making, many were also quite unhappy and disturbed the fact that there were lot of colonies paying the price for this advancement that Britain was making. And also the lower class workers at home and also in the colonies they remained extremely unhappy and they did not have any kind of access to the rights of the middle class and the upper middle class population within England had.

And this compromise could also be defined as a compromise between philanthropy and tolerance and repression this could also be evident in the many contrasting and complex laws that England began to pass and the acts that they began to pass from the 19th century onwards, for instance we do find certain very encouraging events such as the abolition of slavery in 1833 and the tolerance for Catholics in 1829 but alongside these acts that also existed certain very repressive things such as the punishment of the Tolpuddle martyrs which was an event in the 1834 and also the conditions of the poor that was not getting any better in fact it was only getting worst.

And in 1819 following the Peterloo massacre there was also a (16:03) suppression of the rights of the unemployed ex-soldiers but there was also a ray of hope in between as in when the government began to prohibit child labor specially in the factories, there was also a factory act of 1833 which insisted government inspection and supervision on all the factories but irrespective of that we do find that all was not well with this system of governance or with the general (16:24) of the society.

There was a way in which the Victorian values and the Victorian economy and politics were getting into logger heads with each other.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:36)



**+ A Victorian Temper**

- Multiple strands of ideology and thinking
- Conservatives vs. Liberals – social hierarchy, classical taste in art vs. utilitarianism and collective action
- The divide between believers and agnostics
- Social hypocrisy about sexuality – Victorian prudishness
- Earnestness, moral responsibility, domestic propriety
- Ideas of moral function of art vs. drive towards pure aestheticism
- Fascination for technology and scientific developments
  - Age of first computer – Charles Babbage / Ada Lovelace (Byron's daughter) – first computer programmer

For the more appropriate and detailed understanding it is important to understand what the Victorian temper is, it in fact brought together multiple strains of ideology and thinking and also in case with this complex compromise that we just now spoke about. So in that sense there was

an ongoing task between the conservatives and the liberals and also there was discussions about socio hierarchy and about the classical taste and art versus utility utilitarianism and collective action.

So we do find all of these contrasting and complex elements dominating not just the ethos of the times but also these things penetrating into the literary works of this period which is why the Victorian period is known as an age of transition again signaling the confusions of the modern times and even the most modern times. Right at the outset we spoke about the scientific inventions that were challenging the very foundation of faith.

So accordingly when we talk about Victorian temper would be impossible not to talk about the divide between the believers and the agnostics which also frames a central part of this dilemma the compromise and the complexity of the Victorian period. Another significant social evolution was the emergence of something known as a Victorian prudishness which also meant that there was a lot of hypocrisy within the society particularly about sexuality and we also find that this sort of prudishness led to a certain value system which also later began to dominate some of the colonial provinces of England.

And in that sense there was an increased focus on values such as earnestness, moral responsibility and domestic priority but there are times when all of these go overboard and we find all of these value systems getting restricted only in promoting certain aspects of social and inequality, social hierarchy and also some gender disparity and we also find that there is a contrasting drive between the ideas of moral function of art and the drive towards pure aestheticism when we discuss the Victorian literature the various aspects and various products of Victorian literature we shall be looking at all of these elements in detail.

And what continues to fascinate and when continues to dominate this period was the fascination for technology and scientific developments and one of the most important milestones of this period also include the initiation towards the computer age by the inventions of Charles Babbage followed by Ada Lovelace, Ada Lovelace does have another interesting detail to her life she was the only legitimate child of Byron or the other children of Byron's being born out of their wedlock.

So we also find a systematic shift towards a new scientific temperament and a new scientific age from the age of Victorianism onwards.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:11)

- + ■ The First Reform Bill of 1832 – destroyed the political supremacy of the landed aristocracy
- Extended the franchise and gave the right to vote to more people – excluded the working classes by its insistence on property ownership
  - Universal suffrage only by 1918
  - The right to vote for all adult women – only by 1928
- Chartism – working classes demanding parliamentary and social reform – concentrated in factory towns such as Manchester (peaked during 1838-48)
  - Industrial Depression – The Hungry Forties – an anxious and critical time
- Reform Bills of 1867 and 1884-85
- Corn Laws of 1815 repealed – agricultural protection at the expense of the consumer – improvement in industrial conditions
- Transformation from oligarchy to 'crown'd Republic'

There were lot of political events which where underscoring this transition and this new momentous change, the first one was a reform Bill of 1832 which destroy the political supremacy of the landed aristocracy but it was not the end point of the struggle which had only began between the landed gentry and the working class though this reform Bill of 1832 extended the franchise and gave the right to vote to more people it excluded the working classes by it insistence on property ownership.

In fact Britain achieves a universal suffrage only by 1918 and the right to vote for all adult women is granted only by 1928. So in that sense we noticed that whatever happened from the 1830s onwards and Britain was only the beginning of social change and a political change which was to perhaps reach its culmination only in the 20th century. There was also another movement which dominated this period known as Chartism this was in fact featured by the working classes demanding parliamentary and social reform.

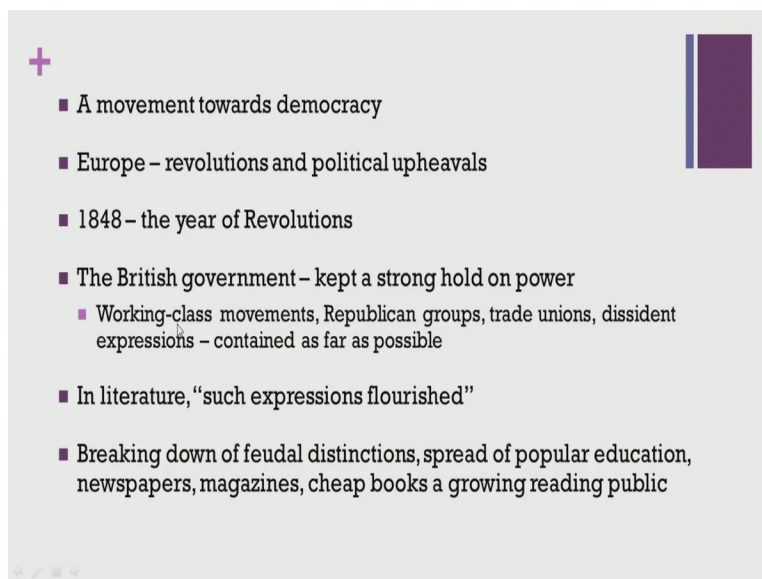
And this movement particularly was concentrated in factor towns such as Manchester and this peaked during the decade 1838 to 1848 but however what damping this spirit of all of these political movements was the industrial depression which happened in the 1840s this is also

known as the period of The Hungry Forties. So this also led to a very anxious miserable and critical time in England particularly for the working class communities.

Two more reform Bills followed in 1867 and in 1884-85 and this was also a significant move towards the repealing of the Corn Laws of the 1850, in fact the Corn Laws of the 1815 were not progressive at all this was the formal figure cultural protection offer to the farmers at the expense of the consumer. So there were ongoing protest against this Corn Law which was instituted in 1815 but however following the reform Bills we find them being repealed and also there is a slight improvement in the industrial conditions.

This socio political and economic trajectory could be better seen perhaps in the novelistic articulation of this period and we shall be coming back to this time and again when we progress with the discussion of the literature of the of the Victorian times. And in terms of power we also see a transition from oligarchy to 'crown'd Republic' it was also much favored given that England had already transitioned itself from being an absolute monarchist state towards a limited monarchist state.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:51)



- A movement towards democracy
- Europe – revolutions and political upheavals
- 1848 – the year of Revolutions
- The British government – kept a strong hold on power
  - Working-class movements, Republican groups, trade unions, dissident expressions – contained as far as possible
- In literature, “such expressions flourished”
- Breaking down of feudal distinctions, spread of popular education, newspapers, magazines, cheap books a growing reading public

In all of these events where the social political economic or overall historical we find a movement within Britain towards larger kinds of democracy and this was also an extension of the political (21:54) and the revolutions which were happening in around Europe, in fact 1848 is designated as a Europe revolutions by most of the European nations and in spite of many

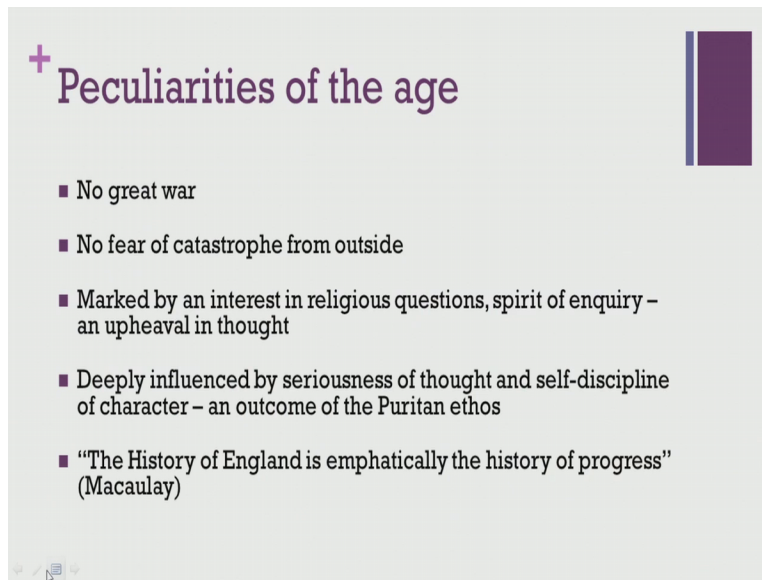
things which were happening across Europe in many different countries we find Britain holding on to power and we do not find the British government losing out at any point of time and there where lot of unrest happening during this period such as the working class movement, the republican groups were coming up, the trade unions were asking for more rights for the working class there was also a number of dissident expressions from various quarters of the society and there is more need to foreground and articulate the concerns of the depressed sections.

However we find the British government containing all of these dissident movements as far as possible but however it is very important and useful to remember that in literature all such expressions flourished that was the singular space where all of these expressions and all of these moves of dissident, moves of anxiety and the movements of this dilemma could be articulated in a better way.

And this exhibition could be found in multiple ways and not just in proper literary articulation we find in general a breaking down of the feudal distinctions and the spread of popular education and the spread of newspaper, number of magazines were also getting easily available, books were becoming cheaper and there was also a growing reading public not just in London but almost all the parts of England. The circulating libraries during this period they also played a significant role in making sure that the books and reading materials reached everyone across cutting across a class and gender.

And there was a time in England when only London was a center of all reigning, all culture and all political activity but from this time onwards with this increased communication and with the increased spread of scientific technology we find all of nation together participating in this race towards achieving greater heights.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:54)



+ Peculiarities of the age

- No great war
- No fear of catastrophe from outside
- Marked by an interest in religious questions, spirit of enquiry – an upheaval in thought
- Deeply influenced by seriousness of thought and self-discipline of character – an outcome of the Puritan ethos
- “The History of England is emphatically the history of progress” (Macaulay)

Summing up the peculiarities of this war it is quite notable that during this age we do not find Britain being part of any war, so in that sense there were no external forces which were causing any kind of catastrophe within England and England was quite free from any external influences as far as its political and its economic conditions were concerned.

We also find England becoming more independent and more concerned about national security and sense of national consciousness becomes higher than ever at the same internally it was a time when people began to question many of the conventional trades and many of the conventional beliefs we find a market interest and growth in religious questions and also a spirit of inquiry began to dominate all works of life.

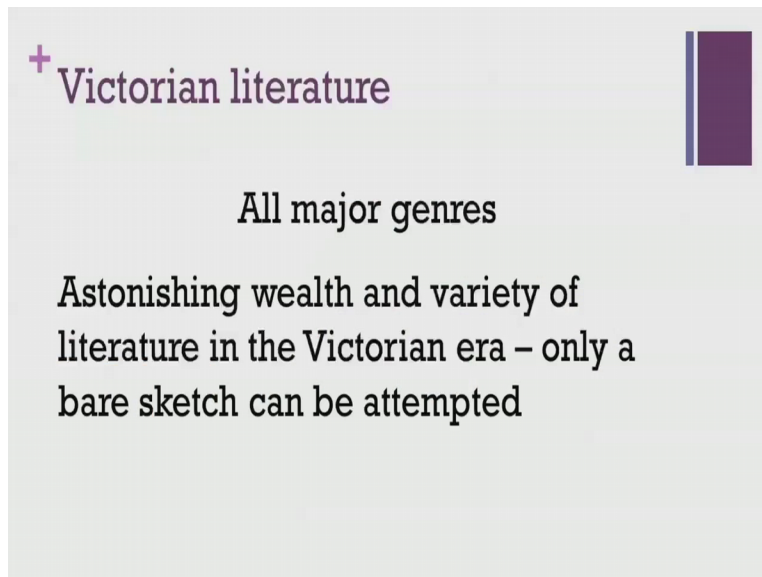
This period in general though it was quite peaceful in terms of politics and history it could be seen as a period which is characterized by an upheaval in thought. During this time (( ))(24:48) not just the writers and thinkers but also the scientists, the economies, the politicians and even though common people being deeply influenced by seriousness of thought and self-discipline of character. This some of the historians feel that it is an outcome of the puritan ethers which dominated one of the previous centuries.

In a way as we had been highlighting from the beginning of the course the sense of continuity and the sense of stability which could be seen in the ideas of literary history it begins to form a full circle with a discussion of the Victorian period and also the later periods. We begin to notice

that there is a connection which that we can begin to identify across ages and across literary periods and political periods and that one era or one event or one movement does not really have a closure and that particular era itself but it comes back and in many different ways in the later kinds of influences as well.

As we have talked about multiple things as by way of introduction to the Victorian age as we begin to sum up it perhaps suffice to just a quote the words of Macaulay the history England emphatically is a history of progress. So this is perhaps the way in which the Victorian age is best remembered and we also will be continuing to look at the various literary outputs of this period.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:08)

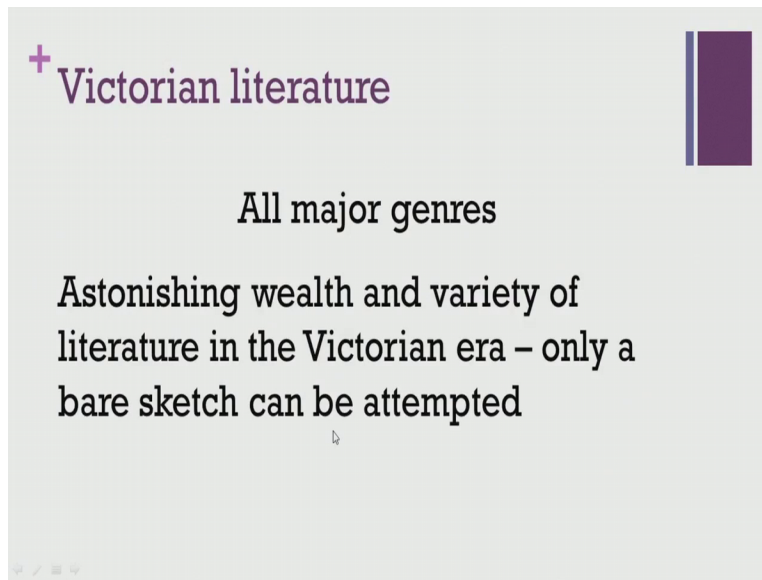


And significantly unlike most of the other literary ages during the Victorian period almost all major genres flourished quite well the Victorian novel, Victorian poetry, Victorian drama and a significant Victorian (())(26:21) as well.

So when we begin our discussion of this period we also will find it quite difficult to contain everything within the canvas of this lecture.



(Refer Slide Time: 26:33)



So again let me wind up this lecture by quoting a Henry Hudson that this period has an astonishing wealth and variety of literature but only a bare sketch can be attempted. So in the next few sessions we will be attempting a bare sketch of the Victorian era and we hope to be able to do justice to the course as far as possible.

That is all we have for today's lecture, thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the coming sessions.