

Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Lecture – 60
Conclusion

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. This is the concluding session, the concluding lecture for this entire course. At the very outset I thank you for participating in this course. I hope you enjoyed it. I hope there were some takeaways for you which are interesting and helpful for you in terms of your future academic endeavours.

So, let me just quickly go through some of the fundamental things we have dealt with in this particular course in terms of looking at the texts we have covered and some of the recursive themes which have come up. So, we started off with Tagore's *The Postmaster* and then moved on to *Heart of Darkness*, and then of course, the poetry of Eliot we found that at the very beginning some of these texts that we can cluster together, we find this very interesting correlation between language and consciousness which is something that early twentieth century literature does quite well. It is that kind of a literature which really talks about the human thought processes, the thinking mind the feeling self and how that negotiates with the surroundings - politically, culturally, discursively etcetera.

So, language becomes a very fluid medium in modernism in early twentieth century literature and the fluidity of language is something which we really pay attention to when we do a very serious study of this kind of literature in terms of how that fluidity is inward looking as well as outward looking. So, there is that reflexive quality about this language. It is both inward looking, it tells you about the mind, the thought processes, the consciousness, the epiphanies etcetera and equally it is about the outward looking consciousness in terms of connecting to some of the apparatus around.

So, it is very interesting entanglement of interiority and materiality and that is something which this kind of language does very well. The entanglement of it, between interiority and materiality. That's what we find very pervasively present in *The Postmaster* by Tagore, *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad and also Eliot's early poetry, *Prufrock and Other Observations* and also *Wasteland*. And, then we see how that gets

extended more stylistically and let us say James Joyce's *Dubliners* which was a collection of short stories which we did, this one story the we did as an example of that.

And, how again language becomes a capsule of consciousness, but at the same time it connects to some very fundamental cultural issues such as religion, repression, desire you know the whole idea of institution including school, church and the apparatus of family and how does thinking and feeling mind negotiate over all these things all this apparatus in terms of arriving at a destination, that whether the destination is erotic destination or an intellectual destination or an existential destination.

And, of course, *Araby* - the story is about a failure to arrive at a destination, failure to find the right destination, but the process becomes very important. And, again this can be connected back to some of the texts earlier as well where the manner in which language is told becomes more important than the matter. So, what is told becomes secondary and how that is told becomes more important, primary in terms of investigation that we see in this kind of literature because like I said it is both outward looking as well as inward looking. And, this inside outside dialectic is something which is wonderfully balanced in early twentieth century modernist literature.

So, and then of course, we did James Joyce's *Ulysses* which is a magnum opus in modernism in some sense. It is about this massive novel about one day and again consciousness, epiphany, stream of consciousness, thought processes, memory all this become very vital points. And, also these are not completely interiorized categories they always connect to political categories, imperialism, the catholic church – all these keep getting connected with this sort of fluidity in language. So, fluidity and liminality in language become very important categories and these are very recursive themes in early twentieth century literature which is something which you saw throughout this course.

And, then of course, we have a medical text like *Mrs. Dalloway* you know which is entirely about you know post traumatic stress disorder; how does trauma get represented and then move on to a different kind of trauma to survive this trauma which you see in Mansfield's short story *The Fly* and then of course, the whole idea of fetish, abnormality of the human mind and again how this abnormality is in a way a response to the political condition, a response to the cultural condition around.

So, again we are back to the same argument of the relationship between interiority and materiality and how that keeps connecting in very complex combinations. And, how the complex combination is something which is represented in literature in this sort of language very deliberately deterritorialized language, very deliberately defamiliarizing language, this very deliberately self-reflexive language, right.

And, of course, the final short story is very political as well Toba Tek Singh is about partition and then Premchand's *The Chess Players*, *Shatranj ke Khiladi* is about the takeover of the kingdom of Lucknow and how that becomes a sort of precursor for imperialism, British imperialism in some sense.

So, throughout this course what I have attempted hopefully is to sort of look at the way in which language can be used as a very potent medium for political representation, for agentic representation, how language becomes a very complex representation of identity, the identity of the feeling human mind and the fluidly feeling human mind is something which keeps getting represented and the fluidity of feeling is something which is obviously, connecting across different kinds of political parameters, cultural parameters, social parameters which are very real material apparatus and the reality and the materiality of this apparatus gets sort of interestingly absorbed in a very liminal way into this kind of a form, an order of cultural representation.

So, if we take a look at something like epiphany which is this very inward looking, gaze into the consciousness. So, how epiphany is also a very political thing because it is also reflection as a response to the cultural surroundings you know around you, the cultural materiality around you. So, how that gets represented in an epiphany is something which you know we should be interested in looking and investigating.

But, most importantly and most fundamentally this course aimed was designed to sort of give a very complex and thorough representation of how literature as a fictional category can be a very profound commentary on political events and historical events and cultural events and how these events can be focalized in fictions. How fiction becomes the focal point which combines as I may have said at the very beginning of this course; the very complex cognitive combinations between what did take place, and what did not take place with what could have taken place. All these complex combinations, all these focal

points are combined together and in the process we get the production of fictions, the fiction of the production of possibility.

So, if it was anything at all I think this course aimed to really give you a flavour of fiction as a production of possibility and how the production of possibility is a very complex commentary on political events, historical events, racial events, gendered events and how all these very experiential conditions, of politics and you know culture etcetera get represented in literature and how literature becomes a very potent medium for these forms of representation.

So, this has been a real journey for me as well as a resource person. Hopefully this was an interesting journey for you as well starting from Tagore's Postmaster ending with Premchand's Shatranj ke Khiladi with different European and English texts around this world. And, hopefully this is going to give me some signpost in terms of your research ahead. So, I do wish you all the best for your research ahead. Do not hesitate to contact me in email or informally in any of the forum that you might come by, do keep interacting in the online forum that is there for this particular course. So, I and my TAs Soham Chakraborty and Swikriti Sanyal have been very helpful and instrumental through all of this course, we are very happy to engage with you in any way that we can.

So, thank you again for attending you know twentieth century fiction, this NPTEL course. I hope my TAs and I hope this has been an enjoyable experience for you and we look forward to see you again in the not too distant future.

Thank you for your participation and thank you for your attention.