

# **THE ENGLISH NOVEL: INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES**

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**Lecture 01**

**Introduction: Why Study a Novel**

Hello students, I am Professor Smita Jha from the Department of Humanities, and I'm here to discuss today the topic, Why Study a Novel? while the broader title is Reading English Novel and Interdisciplinary Approaches. Well, we are in the age of science and technology where we generally say that humanity is no more humanity, meaning by that it has touched the various disciplines and thus becoming an interdisciplinary subject.

There is no harm when we say interdisciplinary because humanity is a broad area of study. So the topic in question, why study a novel, is analysing this particular aspect that how and why we call it an interdisciplinary subject or approach. Well, we human beings, being very curious in nature, have come a long way in their attempts to find out something new and different. And as I said, that this is an age of science and technology, innovations and experiments and due to this inquisitiveness, men always want to unfold or decode the mystery hidden in the womb of earth. As a result of this behaviour, tremendous changes are taking place, not only in science and technology, but in every discipline. Why humanity is very broad? Because if we talk of psychology, sociology, philosophy, economics, gender perspective, this subject comprises almost all. Globalization as a result of development and progression in science and technology has brought drastic changes at all levels and disciplines.

Advancement has given intensification to many issues and challenges and this is the high time to discuss the interdisciplinary aspect of humanities i.e. the reading of novel, the issues that arise are not related to any one discipline but to multiple fields. Thus, nowadays research, inventions or discoveries that take place are not confined only to one discipline and this is the need of the hour. The researcher, though working in particular field, has to travel to other disciplines too, like literature is very close to philosophy as well as psychology and most of the theories used by us are taken from sociology. This kind of

crisscrossing results in support and collaboration from other disciplines. So, this course, thus, focuses on the importance and scope of interdisciplinary approach in research and which I think is very, very important for all the students of English literature. In the present time, the problem of understanding is becoming one of the most relevant ones.

This being determined by that fact that our cognitive activity, that is to say; thought process activity is connected with the understanding and interpretation of verbal text as well as with the understanding of the other one in the process of communication within our situation and within a text. To determine the essence of understanding, one should apply the interdisciplinary approach. In humanities, we have mostly textual researches, qualitative researches, textual analysis that means a close reading of the text and only after a close reading of text, one can be in a position to analyse a particular subject, theme or novel from the point of view of research, innovative research. The text understanding analysis in respect of the interdisciplinary aspects suggests its complex examination based on the principles of sciences such as Cognitive linguistics, Cognitive psychology, Social psychology, Psycholinguistics, Text linguistics, Social linguistics, and Pragmatics. It encompasses all the important subjects from social sciences and linguistics within the text understanding, interdisciplinary and a study paradigm. Relevant is the finding of understandings, role as a cognitive and interpreting activity in the establishment of the text sense, that is cognitive linguistics and as I said, cognitive means thought process, linguistics; the science of language, or codes, the description of the essence of pre-understanding, i.e. philosophical hermeneutics, communicates pre-knowledge, pragmatics or practical knowledge, the communicates presuppositions, i.e. cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, text linguistics, means your understanding, observation of the text, the description of the text as a discourse, that is dialogue, conversation, discourse linguistics and the communicants interaction conditions, i.e. Social psychology and all these aspects are there while we go for a textual analysis in humanities.

So, to start with a novel, what is a novel? How to read a novel, of course, from the perspective of research? A novel is a narrative work or prose fiction that tells a story about a specific human experiences over a considerable length. So the length of a novel is very important and here I would like to make distinction between a novel and a short story.

A novel is one that may take time to finish, to complete with a universal theme, plot, many characters while a short story is the one that one can finish in three hours or in one sitting with, you know, emergent theme. So in a way, we can say that short story is monument to a moment while novel is monument to a universal theme. So, the prose style and length as

well as fictional or semi-fictional subject matter are the most clearly defining characteristics of a novel. Unlike works of epic poetry, it tells a story using prose rather than verse. Unlike short stories, it tells a lengthy narrative rather than a brief selection. There are, however, other characteristic elements that set the novel apart as a particular literary form.

That is why I made a distinction between novel and short story, and poetry, epic poetry. The famous critic, writer I.A Richard says that anything on the page, any text, whether in the form of verse or in the form of prose, it could be called literary text. But then here we are talking about the prosaic prose, the prose that is novel. So, a novel is a work of prose fiction that tells a narrative over an extended length. Novels dates as far back as 1010's *Tale of Genji* by Murasaki Shikibu; European novel first appeared in the early 17th century because, see, prose writings were there. But novel in the proper sense of the term, novel in the regular sense of the term, started, in fact from 18th century with the novel of Samuel Richardson.

Novels overtook epic poetry and chivalric romances as the most popular mode of storytelling with an emphasis on the personal reading experience. Today, novels come in a wide array of sub-genres. Yes, different kind of novels and as I said that we are in a high-tech world and the fiction, you know, we find as per the dimension and per the situation and that define different genre that we shall discuss later on.

Although a novel is typically a work of fiction, many novels do weave in real human history. This can range from full-fledged novels of historical fiction which focus on a specific era in history or depict semi-fictional narrative about real historical persons to works of fiction that simply exist in the real "world and carry the baggage and implications".

Well, while I'm dealing with the novels and defining novels and the type of novels, because it is very important to know the basic nature of novel to adopt an interdisciplinary approach. The genre, the very nature, the very weaving out of the novel, because as I said, in research, we generally go for, you know, close reading or textual reading. There also are early modern works of historical non-fiction that were embellished with unconfirmed traditions or made-up speeches for dramatic effect.

Despite this, for most purposes, we can assume that when we are talking about novels, we are talking about works of narrative fiction but in the present world, we have non-fictional novel also. See, with the passage of time, the style of writing, the style or the way of

understanding, all these are going under change. So we need to know some of the aspects of novel. But what is important- the approach, the reading style, and that should be interdisciplinary.

But I would start and I would quote here Francis Bacon's, you know, famous essay *Of Studies*, which is very very important, one of the best essays, I must say. Later, it was revised in 1612. With the addition of some more sentences and ideas in it along with the alteration in some vocabulary terms. And what is there in *Of Studies*? Because this is one of my favorite essays, "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested; that is, some books are to be read only in parts; others to be read, but not curiously and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention". So it depends on the fiction quality as well as your interest. But then reading is a serious task. When you are observing something, the verbal text on the page, indeed a serious task to define, to understand.

Well, reading studies serve for delight, for ornament and for ability. And these lines are there in *Of Studies*, if you read Francis Bacon. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring; for ornament is in discourse; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. The second and most important use Francis Bacon is studying for the ornament of communication purposes. Very true! Reading enriches your vocabulary, your communication skills. He has explained how a study can help official or unofficial communication get more ornamental and better between the parties. The last and one of the most valuable uses of *Of Studies* is how a study can help judge someone or something. A person who has studied the theme or topic or the job well can have someone he wants very well compared to someone who is not an expert. See the importance of reading, grasping, observing, you know, the text on the page. And if you read *Of Studies* carefully, you will find the gist of reading fiction. What is the importance of books in our life? That is also a question and before explaining interdisciplinary approach.

Books play a quintessential role in every student's life, every man's life, every human's life by introducing them to a world of imagination providing knowledge of the outside world, improving their reading, writing and speaking skills as well as boosting memory and intelligence. Unfortunately, we are losing reading habit these days. The reason behind distraction that I call digital distraction. See, communication skills in this age of Globalization, in this age of science and technology, commercialisation, we utter most of the time that how to improve communication skills, which is one of the important aspects of enhanced personality and reading is one of them. To improve your communication skill

is reading books. The importance of books in our life cannot be undermined, for they not only help in broadening our horizons, but also act as doorways to connecting us with the world around us. They function as survival kits. They influence us and leave an impact on us. I mean, students, if you want to know the benefits of books and importance of reading and curious about how books impact our life, this course is going to help you immensely. Being a professor of literature, a student of literature, you know, I always enjoy reading books. I always suggest good books, and I personally believe that the reading habit enriches you in all the aspects; your knowledge, your personality, your understanding, your appearance. Literature, novel, book helps us better understanding our lives, ourselves and the world around us. Encounters with literature develop the concepts of identification, imagination and empathy.

In our increasingly chaotic world, these skills matter deeply. Why did I say chaotic world? Because before this slide, I used the word digital distractions. Several distractions are there that is why I call it a chaotic world. Taking a deep dive into literature from different cultures allows to both expand one's ability to evaluate and discuss the work itself and also better understand what it tells us about the world, our own beliefs and values and the beliefs and values of others. Literature, fiction, reading novel is for everyone, no matter what your future, measure or career may be.

Studying literature tests your creative mind, inspiring innovation and change. It helps us use our written languages as a practical everyday tool that enlightens, educates and inspires those who interact with it. Why do we study literature? Why should we read fiction? Why should we go for novel?

That is the question! Beyond thinking only about the practical skills to land you a job after college, studying literature is a meaningful endeavor. Simply put it, engaging with literary works written by good authors from various cultures, viewpoints, and historical periods broadens our understanding of other people and our overall worldview. And as I said, we are in a globalized world, the study of fiction, novel, literature also exercises your critical thinking skills. This aspect is very important whether you are a student of science, fiction, literature Improving criticality of your mind, thinking that can be used in all aspects of your life and in any career.

The experience of studying and discussing literature in a classroom prepares to think critically on your own about areas such as film, news, social media, sparking news, conversation and raising insightful questions. Now, one of the most widely used forms of

expression is the written word and it has been for centuries. Whether you are engrossed in the drama of an ancient play or a compelling contemporary novel you can notice parallels between the characters and our own behavior and current events. Great literature also teaches us about significant life issues. From the beginning, we are raised on the stories of a struggle, human against a vast array of challenges whether they be other people, nature or one's own self. The struggle against a challenge is central to literature.

By reading and analyzing the material, you grow your understanding of why humans create conflict, how it can be resolved and what you can do to ensure preservation for yourself, others and the world around you. See how important it is to read a novel, to read a fiction. Literature allows us a window into places, people and situations we wouldn't be able to experience otherwise. Literature can transport you to another time and place without ever having to leave your room. You experience these stories simply by reading them, imagining them to life in your mind. The feelings evoked whether sad, angry, inspired or blissfully happy are ours to share with the characters in the book. We generally associate ourselves with the book. Literary studies help us to develop a stronger sense of who we are and how we act in any given situation.

In 2023 study, Researchers found that students with a higher reading ability level had better social-emotional skills than those at a comparatively lower reading level. While scientists are still working on the link between regular reading and empathy levels, there is one thing we can say for sure, Literature can stir emotions deep within us!

So literature, fiction, novel is a concrete way to wake up our senses and bring the world into the sharper focus. Studying literature can help us to observe the things around us, sharpening our ability to listen and hear, smell, taste and touch. i.e. the part of communication skills as well as to enhance our personality skills. Literature deepens our thinking by bringing more awareness of our own values and worldview but also those of others throughout the world and throughout history.

Because literature illustrates concepts in a vivid manner, we can observe differing values and worldviews in action. Literature allows us to explore the implications of various values and worldviews and gives us an excellent opportunity to take a closer look at our own assumptions about the world and compare them with others. Crossing cultural boundaries and yes, this is the role of writing, reading literature. So, literature broadens understanding, our horizons, your horizons. That is why we talk interdisciplinary approach. Cross-cultural

literary studies teach you how to read and interpret complex texts, write persuasive interpretations. And use theoretical frames for literary and cultural interpretation.

So writing literature and literature joined together to teach the importance of understanding imaginative works within their cultural and historical context. Studying the literary traditions of different cultures around the world provides you with a deeper understanding of what a culture's literature says about its people's values and worldviews. Specialised courses offer a more in-depth look at different groups of writers, time period, country, cultures and writing style and that is why now we talk humanity as an interdisciplinary subject. We have various dimensions, medical humanities, digital humanities, comic writing, comic novels and alike. So what are the benefits of novelist study? Builds community in the classroom. Engaging character and plots keep students interested in reading, develops vocabulary and decoding skills, helps build stamina, improve fluency, improve comprehension, expose students to different emotions, experience and environments, to build compassion and background knowledge and develop writing skills by studying the author's craft.

So, literature is art! Just as paint and musical notes are medium used for deep and beautiful expression, so are words. Some people are good with clay and they make a sculpture. Others have a skill with a paintbrush or with sound and they produce paintings and music. And then some are gifted with words and they write our literature. So, English classes give an opportunity to study reading novel with interdisciplinary approach. Literature is also a culture. Education, including the studying of novels in English class is the passing of a cultural group's shared foundation of knowledge and ideas on to the next generation. This knowledge is hard won.

We took hundreds of years to get where we are in Western culture. It is important that a people share the same background of rich knowledge and pass it on. A shared education and values makes communication with one another much easier. That is why I said psychology, sociology, historical context, philosophy. It is the shared knowledge when we have a common culture, common knowledge we can express complex ideas in just a few words and the listener will understand how much more efficient and productive that is than looking at one another with blank stares. Ignoring or losing our literary heritage would be a great loss indeed and we had to have to start from scratch. Plus, inheriting common cultural riches gives us equal opportunities.

We all start from the same body of knowledge and idea and this is real social justice. As I would like to quote literature is history. When we as a country don't immerse ourselves in the way past people thought, spoke and made art, we are lost and shallow. We operate in a vacuum. We build our opinions and collective decision making on thin air. We are ignoring the voices of wise, experienced people or even of sadly mistaken people and trying to go it alone. What a loss! Our history textbooks pieces, you know, together past events and attempts to identify causes from available evidence. Writers produce literature right in the thick of historical event and this make history immediate, real and personal.

Literature gives depth and wisdom and it helps to see the world. So, in his book, *Literature in Our Life*, award-winning teacher and author Richard Jacobs shows that reading, thinking about and writing or talking about English literature involves us all personally. Texts talk to us intimately and urgently, inviting us to talk back, intervening in and changing our life and here, my dear students, I conclude that looking into the wide horizon of literature, you know, we should develop first our reading habit and then we can, you know, connect the literature with other important upcoming aspects of this high-tech world and then we can develop the research paradigm. With this,

Thank you very much! In the next lecture, I'm going to discuss the art of fiction and genre.