

**Course Name: The Novel and Change**

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**Lecture 10**

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL School entitled Novel and Change. We are looking at Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel* in Understanding of Robinson Crusoe through the Cultural Landscape in which a novel was written. So we have already had a session on this and we will just continue from where we left off last time and if you remember we were talking about following Watt's brilliant analysis, how the novel Robinson Crusoe is very closely located, very closely situated with the changing economic dimensions, the changing social dimensions of the time. where there is a very interesting interest in ordinariness and the rise of the ordinary man and of course we have different kinds of philosophical, scientific discourses coming in with Newtonian science, with John Locke's associationism in terms of understanding how the thought processes work. So the very intersectional way to look at the macro quality of life, the horizontal quality of life through which life moves across time and space and territories and coordinates but also the micro quality of life, the more atomic quality of life in terms of how looking at you know the internal condition of life, the psychological condition of life. the consciousness condition of life. So, this intersection between consciousness and materiality is what makes this particular age very, very interesting. And the text Robinson Crusoe should be located through this intersectional study, which is what Watt is also offering. So this should be on your screen. We now look at how Robinson Crusoe specifically as a text really caters to these really complex cultural coordinates in terms of understanding how it corresponds to social change which is what this course is all about. How a work of fiction, how a novel can correspond very closely to social changes, political changes, economic changes and so on and so forth. So Robinson Crusoe has been very appropriately used by many economic theorists as the illustration of homo economicus, homo economicus, a very important phrase, man the

economic animal, man the financial animal, man the monetary animal. So the whole idea of money, the whole idea of economy, the whole idea of shall we say creating and calibrating and consolidating capital, right. The entire discourse network around the capital, the entire arrangement of capital and how along with being homo sapiens, along with being homo faber, we talked about homo faer as in man the laborer, man the maker, man the builder. how this notion of the homo economicus becomes very important as well and we can see how Robinson Crusoe becomes some kind of a meta text for that you know white male subject ends up being shipwrecked in an island but has this very interesting, very complex and very robust self-sustaining strategy through which he can build himself again and he can literally build a plantation, literally build an empire and of course through the process he acquires capital, he comes back as a wealthy man which is the whole purpose of his movement away from the erstwhile moral territory.

And we talked about this already how the transition from one spectrum to another spectrum is also very interestingly reflective or reflected in the narrative transition that the novel is doing. From the pastoral idyllic to the more realistic, the form of realism where there is a lot of emphasis on materiality, object and the everydayness of object, the everydayness of materiality, the quotidian quality. So the slow building of the capital, the slow making of the territory, the slow process of territorialization, the slow process of capitalization, so all these things get very interestingly represented in Robinson Crusoe. And if you remember when you read the novel that there are long passages in Robinson Crusoe, which is about bookkeeping, which are about bookkeeping. And it's quite boring in many sense. But that's exactly the point that the boredom, the slow process of collecting information, the slow process of collecting capital, the slow process of collecting labor and that begins to become a very symbolic way, a symbolic structural way through which we can understand the rise of capitalism, right. So, it becomes a meta text in many ways. Now what is Homo economicus and this is what you know Ian Watt talks about a little bit and we shall spend some time unpacking this concept. Just as a body politic was a symbol of the communal way of thought typical of previous societies, so economic man, man the economic animal, homo economicus, economic man symbolized the new outlook of individualism and its economic aspects. So we come back to the notion of individualism again. And we saw how

in the previous sessions how individualism is connected to agency, autonomy, freedom, choice and so on and so forth. But they all point to one direction specifically which is this is an age of possibility through which the ordinary man can become extraordinary through hard work, labor, manipulation, capitalization and so on and so forth which wasn't really possible in a previous epoch where it was almost predestined if you are a son of a king you will be a king, if you are a son of a tailor you will be a tailor and so on and so forth but in this particular age there is this huge sense of mobility coming in and with the mobility there is this aspirational economy, an economy of aspiration, an economy of ambition, an economy of fantasy, wish fulfilment and the sea becomes a very symbolic site over here in the sense that the sea with all its fluidity, with all its possibilities, with all its peril and precarity becomes a very important site, a very important symbol through which these aspirations may be materialize and also frustrated depending on these individual circumstances, right. But the entire notion of the homo economicus, man the economic animal, man the monetary animal, right, the money-making man, like the building man, like homo faber, is connected deeply and organically and complexly with the notion of individualism. Adam Smith, Adam Smith is a very important figure because he's one of the first philosophers really who talk about the notion of capital and consciousness and materiality and subjectivity.

So, and he spends a lot of time talking about the rise of capitalism and the Protestant ethic and we talked about that already. How the rise of Protestantism, the rise of Calvinism, the rise of certain kind of puritanism are also connected with the rise of capitalism and it's not a coincidence that these connections happen. So, Adam Smith has been charged with invention, actually the concept is much older but it is natural that it should have come to the fore as an abstraction expressing the individualism of the economic system as a whole, only when the individualism of the system itself had reached an advanced stage of development right. So the advanced stage of development of capitalism also gave rise to the concept that Adam Smith talked about, this very interesting collusion between capital society, individualism, morality, etc. and work ethic. That Robinson Crusoe, like Defoe's other main characters, Moll Flanders, Roxana, Colonel Jacque and Captain Singleton, is an embodiment of economic individualism hardly needs demonstration. The entire novel

is about that. It is an embodiment of economic individualism. The economy in Robinson Crusoe is all centered on that man. He is an embodiment. He is literally the body, the moving body of the capital as it were. All Defoe's heroes pursue money, often at the cost of earlier forms of morality, often at the cost of earlier templates of morality etc. All of Defoe's heroes pursue money which he categoristically called the general denominating article in the world and they pursue it very methodically according to the profit and loss bookkeeping which Max Weber considered to be the distinctive technical feature of modern capitalism. So again Max Weber is someone who has wrote extensively of the Protestant work ethic and the rise of capital like Adam Smith. But again we were looking at here is how the idea of bookkeeping the very meticulous slow process of acquiring capital, calibrating capital becomes important and we have seen if you remember you Robinson Crusoe you had seen how there are long passages of bookkeeping where he is making the sort of the valency binary the good things which happen today the bad things which happen today right and sometimes the vocabulary of that you know bookkeeping is quite Christian, so it's very interesting sometimes seamless, sometimes uneasy mixture of the Christian vocabulary with a very profit making, a very profit oriented mind, a very profit oriented you know analysis which gets the vocabulary which is quite biblical sometimes. So that uneasy mixture is something which we see happening in Robinson Crusoe but it's also reflective of the cultural condition of the time.

Right so this is a very distinctive technical feature of modern capitalism. Defoe's heroes we observe have no need to learn this technique, they almost born with this technique, this ingrained in them the idea of bookkeeping. So no matter why you situate them whether it's a prison or a you know an abandoned island the bookkeeping instinct will take over and then will just execute itself on its own almost an autopilot mode. have no need to learn this technique. Whatever the circumstances of their birth and education, they have it in their blood, and keep us more fully informed of the present stocks of money and commodities than any other characters in fiction. So, they keep reminding us as it were of their stocks and you know the different kinds of bookkeeping techniques, the bookkeeping arsenal as it were, the locks as it were, you know that becomes a very important part of the plot in, you know, in Defoe's novels. Crusoe's bookkeeping conscience, indeed, has established an effective priority over his other thoughts and emotions. When his Lisbon steward offers

him 160 moidores to alleviate this momentary difficulty on return, Crusoe relates, I could hardly refrain from tears while he spoke. In short, I took hundreds of these moidos and called for a pen and ink to give him a receipt from them. So again, look at this almost comical way in which he is weeping in joy, he is weeping out of gratitude but at the same time he is very careful to call for a piece of paper and a pen just so he can give a receipt, a very very bureaucratic way with which the money is calibrated, the money is stamped, the money is profiled, the money is classified and this culture of classification if one might say you know call it that way the cultural classification is also very much collusive a hand in glove shall we say with the culture of commodification because this is also the age of commodity oriented cultures everything is a commodity everything has a price tag everything must be classified to a price tag and that classification often it relates very closely very organically with the idea of the commodity and what becomes the commodity what constitutes the commodity right and obviously human subjects become commodities as you saw with the case of Friday and that's a very colonial, post-colonial discourse coming in in Robinson Crusoe where the white subject looks at a non-white subject and by default the non-white subject is always already a commodity, always already some kind of a reified product, something with a price tag, something which has a utility value to it.

Right, so bookkeeping is but one aspect of a central theme in a modern social order. Our civilization as a whole is based on individual contractual relationships as opposed to the unwritten traditional and collective relationships of previous societies. The idea of contract played an important part in the theoretical development of political individualism. So contract as in something written down. as in something classified, as in something textual in quality, something which has semiotic qualities, it is a shared semiotic system where you understand what is written out, it is all spelled out, there is nothing verbal about it, nothing non-written about it, so this entire bureaucratic process through which contract or contractual relationships happen is also in a very totemic way is also pointing to the very transactional nature of relationships that you know Defoe is talking about, the rise of the 18th century novel, the rise of the mercantile class, the rise of the trading class, rise of the ordinary man who can become a trader, who can become a wealthy man, is purely based in many occasions on very transactional relationships. Now for transactions to take place

especially across cultures, especially across continents there has to be mutually agreed understanding of the semiotic system through which transactions can be established, through which relationships can be reified and that transaction relationship requires bookkeeping, requires a contractual obligation. So hence the idea of the pen and the ink and the paper and the signs and the symbols because the bookkeeping becomes a very important way through which contracts are written, contracts are maintained, promises are maintained but there is nothing metaphysical about these promises, there is nothing transcendental about these promises. So what we are seeing here is a transition from the transcendental to the transactional, right, and that transition is important for us to understand because the novel is also doing that at the level of plot because the characters in a novel are not this grand, you know, larger than life, hyperbolic, epic character, this is a very ordinary man, ordinary men who are manipulative, who are opportunistic, who are aspirational. So again the transition from transcendental to transactional is also reflected in the terms of how the characters are changing from the epic tradition to the very secular ordinary quotidian quality of the characters, right. So we can see how directly at the level of design, at the level of narrative aesthetics, the novel is carrying or bearing out, shall we say, very closely reflective of this transactional quality that is happening around 18th century, from the transcendental to the transactional, from the epic to the novel.

And this is a newness, the novelty of the novel, shall we say, that we are seeing getting played out and executed at the level of plot in Daniel Defoe and also elsewhere. Now if you come to this section where what talks about the primacy of the economic motive, the primacy of the economic motive and an innate reverence for bookkeeping almost holy, so the holiness, the sacrality is redirected to the bookkeeping, the sacrality is redirected to the money right, so the money is sacred over here, the commodity is sacred over here, so homo economicus right, man the money worshipper, man the money builder so to speak, right. So the sacrality, the divinity, the vocabulary of divinity is redirected, reoriented towards money, towards bookkeeping. So the innate reverence for bookkeeping and the law of contract are by no means the only matters in which Robinson Crusoe is a symbol of the processes associated with the rise of economic individualism. There are other processes at play as well. The hypostasis of the economic motive logically entails a devaluation of other

modes of thoughts, feeling and action. The various forms of traditional group relationship, the family, the guild, the village, the sense of nationality all are weakened, we discussed this earlier as well, right. So there is this break from the family, break from the church, break from the guild, break from the community and that is obviously you know in a way also connected to the rise of the individual and you know we can discuss it in terms of how this connects very complexly with the rise of what we may now call new liberal alienation, the whole idea that, you know, that happens through the American dream, you know, through which one man through hard work and labor and luck can make it big in society, can make it big in culture, the Great Gatsby story, in other words. So, in many ways, Robinson Crusoe, Great Gatsby, you know, Rocky, these things can also be connected in many ways where it doesn't matter what background you come from, it doesn't matter what your ancestry is which can be very modest in quality but if we have the labor and the ethic and the luck then you can make it big in society as well, right.

So, it connects very interestingly with the new kind of capital which gets recycled again and again to different forms and how it creates certain kinds of aspirational identities, aspirational categories, aspirational subjects, right. So, and what gets weaker in the process are the earlier forms of community, the earlier forms of identity markers, which include the village, the guild, the nationality, et cetera, all are weakened. And so too are the competing claims of non-economic individual achievement and enjoyment ranging from spiritual salvation to the pleasures of recreation. So there's more valency put on making money, there's more valency put on acquiring capital. Now that comes at a cost to the valencies given to us while forms of pursuit like you know sports, like recreation, like spiritual salvation. So those things take a back seat for a change and what becomes prioritized is how and how someone is just and you know the metrics of success in other words becomes mediated through money mediated through capital right so how much capital can you acquire through hard work and labor and luck right so that becomes the important point through which identity markers are re-established okay So this is the backdrop, this is the entire bedrock through which Robinson Crusoe manifests itself through his plot. The plot of Robinson Crusoe becomes played out so to speak through the idea of the homo economicus, through the rise of the money-making man. And of course,

as we all know that the Crusoe becomes you know the achiever, the builder, the maker and also the homo economicus but that comes at a cost of the original sin and we will talk about that in a moment of breaking away from the earlier forms of templates, the earlier forms of kinship structures, right. that should be on your screen. So Crusoe's original sin and interestingly Crusoe actually gains by his original sin which is also something which should be on the screen. He gains monetarily, he gains financially, he gains materially from his original sin and becomes richer than his father was. So in a way Crusoe becoming wealthier than the father is a classic case of the son killing the father symbolically and taking over and becoming the next big male. So, there is a definite symbolic transition in terms of how the old male order, the old patriarchal order is giving way to a new patriarchal order. So Crusoe becomes the new big man of the house, Crusoe becomes the new big man of the system by acquiring more money than his father ever did in his whole lifetime. But the original sin of Crusoe, and this is what Watt also talks about, Crusoe's original sin is really the dynamic tendency of capitalism itself. So the dynamism of capitalism, the mutating quality of capitalism, the changeability, the mutability of capitalism, and this is the kinesis of the capital, is part of the sinful network of capital, the fact that it's not static, the fact that it's not stable.

The fact that it is always changing, the Chameleon quality of capital which takes up different shapes, different figures, different appearances at different points of time. So, Crusoe's original sin is really the dynamic tendency of capitalism itself whose aim is never merely to maintain the status quo but to transform it incessantly, right. So this is the classic idea of the capital. So even if you read very post-modern, post-structuralist theories on capital. or capitalism, let's say someone like Deleuze and Guattari who talks about the, the schizophrenic quality of capitalism, the rhizomatic quality of capitalism. Even there you find that one of capitalism's greatest tendencies, one of the most, one one of the biggest markers of capitalism is its incessant ability to keep changing to transform almost anything into capital even subversion can become capitalistic even subversion can be appropriated this tendency to keep appropriating everything however subversive however radical can be re-altered and made part of the mainstream capital which means the engines of capitalism the machines of capitalism are able to accommodate all kinds of changes so there is this

innate plasticity about capital the innate changeability about capitalism right and this mutability plasticity changeability of capital and capitalism is very much you know they have played out in Robinson Crusoe as well because on one hand there is this original sin of leaving the father and symbolically killing and castrating the father by disobeying him. On the other hand he also gets rewarded for that you know and he becomes wealthier, he becomes you know a man of a great social standing, he becomes a gentleman and someone with great amount of capital which would never have been possible if he stayed back in the old order. Right, so this uneasiness that Crusoe experiences, the ambivalence, the moral ambivalence, ambiguity that Crusoe experiences is very much part of the package shall we say of capital and capitalism. Now we'll move on to the idea of travel in Robinson Crusoe and we'll see how traveling also becomes important symbolically in terms of how the flow of capital occurs and how obviously capitalism and territorialization and violence and militarization are never really far from each other. they operate in very close proximity to one another because Crusoe travels with his gun essentially. So the gun of Crusoe essentially becomes the symbolic weapon, the instrument through which capital can be created and protected.

Also bear in mind the multinational quality of capital over here, the multi-territorial quality of capital over here and this is also a time where big companies like let's say you know the East India Company are beginning to happen, this will happen a little bit later of course but the rise of the multinational capital company, the rise of the multinational investment company, the rise of the multinational banking company, trading company, begin to take place begins to take place around the same time which is all an accident no coincidence at all because this is the cultural social material condition which is giving rise to that kind of a company construct and Crusoe is very much part of that construct Crusoe is a precursor shall we say to that kind of a flowing capital that kind of a multi-territorial capital. What might at first appear to place Robinson Crusoe in the somewhat special category of travel and adventure does not then altogether do so. The plot's reliance on travel does tend to allot Robinson Crusoe a somewhat peripheral position in the novel's line of development, since it removes the hero from his usual setting in a stable and cohesive pattern of social relations. But Crusoe is not a mere footloose traveler. He is not an accidental traveller. He is not a

careless traveller. He is a very careful traveller. He knows what he is doing. And his travels, like his freedom from social ties, are merely somewhat extreme cases of tendencies that are normal in modern society as a whole, since by making the pursuit of gain a primary motive, economic individualism has much increased the mobility of the individual.

More specifically, Robinson Crusoe's career is based, as modern scholarship has shown, on some of the innumerable volumes which recounted the exploits of those voyagers who had done so much in the sixteenth century to assist the development of capitalism by providing the gold, slaves and tropical products on which trade expansion depended. and who had continued the process in the 17th century by developing the colonies and world markets on which the future progress of capitalism depended. So we stop at this point today, but what is important to unpack for us is how the rise of a capital, the rise of travelling, the rise of non-innocent travelling shall we say, not just as a tourist, not just as an explorer or a voyager, but someone with with a mercenary motive, right. So this kind of a traveling becomes a very special kind of traveling. It's not just Crusoe leaving home for an adventure. Here's a definite motive, a definite mercenary motive, a profit-oriented motive. And this of course comes from a very deep-seated historical tradition and which starts even before Daniel Defoe writes a novel where you know what talks about how there are these explorers and voyagers who begin to bring back gold and slaves and look at the way in which gold, slaves and tropical products as put together in one sentence. The very seamless entanglement of gold as a commodity, slave as a commodity, tropical product as a commodity, all these are based on utility, all these are based on disposability. So the moment it is disposed of, the utility is exhausted, it can be disposed of, the slave can be killed, the gold can be thrown away, the tropical product can be done away with, right. So again, perishability becomes a very important part of this kind of a capital enterprise, which is why, because capitalism relies on perishable products, capitalism itself, the tendency of capitalism should be imperishable, it should keep recycling itself, it should keep reinventing itself, hence the entire idea of innovation, hence the entire innovation-oriented idea of capitalism, right.

Because it needs to keep reinventing itself so that even I mean despite dealing with perishable products capitalism must keep finding new forms of commodity and new forms of commodification right. So, there's this incessant, incessant, insatiable you know drive for travelling, appetite for adventure in Robinson Crusoe which is obviously connected with the you know incessant appetite for money, incessant appetite for capital or acquiring capital which Crusoe exhibits. embodies in very, very complex ways and the plot also is designed around that motive as well. So we stop at this point today and in the concluding section of Ian Watt's *Rise of Novel* we will talk about how this can be located in contemporary times as well, this drive, this attitude of Robinson Crusoe may also be located and find some resonance in terms of how we can look at modern versions of capitalism, modern versions, contemporary versions of the subject formation around the capital. Thank you for your attention.