

**Course Name: The Novel and Change**

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**Lecture 4**

So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled Novel and Change. We will continue with Robinson Crusoe which we have started already. So we will start skipping a little bit because we are looking at certain selected portions of the novel in terms of understanding how this piece of fiction, this work of fiction corresponds complexly to some of the cultural conditions of that time, not least to the mercantile expeditions to the expansionist quality of capitalist, capital at that time in terms of how capital was becoming systematized through a process of mercantile behavior, trade, and of course, territorialization. So this age, one might argue, is the age which sees the beginning of what we call capitalism, which then obviously manifests itself in different forms, including imperialism. So as I mentioned in the previous sessions, that this particular text, Robinson Crusoe, which is a work of fiction, loosely based on the life of Alexander Selkirk, that we discussed last class also, is actually a very interesting meta text, if you will, to study the rise of capitalism, the rise of imperialism, the rise of the white man's territorialization in terms of the white man going over to another place very, very outside of his home. and making that into his home through a long laborious process of course, but you know essentially making this into a white man's plantation, a white man's island.

Now, so we will spend some time looking at Chapter 3 which is titled appropriately enough Crusoe's Island. As you can see from the great title itself, the island now begins to belong to Crusoe. So, sense of possession is already happening. So, the island which is just a little piece of nature begins to be referred to as Crusoe's island and it begins to be referred to as belonging to Crusoe. So the sense of property, the sense of ownership begins to come and it is quite clear that this is how the novel is emerging, which is why we study this novel in very close connection to the materialist, capitalist, imperialist

machinery which was beginning to happen, beginning to be formalized around that time. So we will spend some time looking at this chapter and then we will skip over the next class to looking at how Crusoe engages with the beasts and the fowls and what he calls the savages, obviously the non-white people. And again the whole politics of calling them savages is interesting over here, the whole politics of assuming they do not have any civilization, of assuming they do not have any assuming they don't have it in language is obviously quite problematic because he is you know obviously speaking from his position as a white subject and anyone who is outside the white subjects territory you know belongs to the realm of the quote-unquote savages and also territory here is not just the physical place, territory is also the space, the space, the cognitive space, the epistemic space, the known space. So we can see how geography and psychology begin to merge, geography and discourse begins to merge, begin to merge in Robinson Crusoe. So in a sense that the island which was just a small piece of land in the middle of nowhere begins to be called Crusoe's Island and he begins to impose his own civilization, his own language, his own discourse networks in the island gradually expanding it through the beginning of forming of a plantation, his husbandry in terms of maintaining animals and you know birds of different kinds, he's got a parrot as well. But also, we look at how he does a very interesting mixture of religion and bookkeeping. And this is where the Protestant capitalist thing comes really interestingly, because we will talk more about this when we spend some time looking at the cultural context of Robinson Crusoe. But the work ethic which we see in this novel which is building something bit by bit in terms of an expansionist view of the world, it really feeds into the protestant work ethic and how it is very hand in glove in many ways, very collusive shall we say with capitalism, the beginning of capitalism. It is not a surprise that the vocabulary is very Christian in a way, the vocabulary is very Protestant in a way, but the functionality of the mechanism is very much in keeping with the capitalist bookkeeping mechanisms.

So, there is a log that Crusoe begins to keep and we will look at it in some details, the log of good things and bad things. The log of good feelings and bad feelings, right? So, this very bookkeeping culture, the very classification culture, everything is classified, everything is given a name and a symbol through which it can be kept in a very classified

log, a journal. That begins to become important over here. And again, you should spend some time thinking about what is a journal, what is a bookkeeping account. So basically, you are taking some knowledge and giving it some classification. You are taking some objects and symbols and valencies and giving it a classified uniform structure.

So the imposition of uniformity, the imposition of some kind of a discursive network, some kind of a discursive structure to it. is again in the epistemic version of what is happening with the island, right. Because the island which is just a pure piece of land begins to become cartographic in quality, begins to be mapped in quality which is why the role of survey becomes important, you know he is surveying the island, giving it a name, giving it some coordinates. And the same thing happens with the journal. Everything he sees around him gets into the journal you know and what gets in is also given a name, a classification, a certain kind of valency which is maintained and which is uniform and obviously which comes from a position of the white male subject, right. So we can see how epistemic engagement and territorial engagement are very, very collusive with each other in Robinson Crusoe which is obviously not an accident at all.

So with that very brief preamble, we move on to the text in hand. This is Chapter 3, which should be on your screen. It is called Crusoe's Island. My next work was to view the country and seek a proper place for my habitation. and where to store my goods to secure them from whatever might happen. So, he's managed to take a lot of materials from the sinking ship. He's got enough supplies of food and gunpowder and other basic amenities before the ship sank very conveniently. Where I was, I yet knew not. Whether or not, whether on the continent or on an island, whether inhabited or not inhabited, whether in danger of wild beasts or not, there was a help. So, again, as you can see how the whole question of serving is done with a gun and a gunpowder. So basically, the whole place is mapped and this is the ammunition is required to map the place. So, we can see how ammunition and knowledge and mapping they're all coming together in very symbolic organic ways. So, Crusoe goes for a survey of the island. He doesn't know what the island is. He doesn't know if it's part of the continent or some exotic place away from the continent. He still don't mind to map it. He still don't mind to survey it. And how does

he do it? He does it with gun and a powder and he goes gun powder obviously and he goes on to get a uniform vision and you know essentially what is happening in this particular place is that he is beginning to acquire the God gaze. The God gaze is a gaze which surveys everything. He is a monarch of all his surveys. So, he begins to acquire, he begins to work towards getting that God gaze whereby he knows exactly what is happening in all parts of the island, he knows the coordinates, he has the ammunition to control any potential problem. That is beginning to happen. This is a formative phase for that ontological condition. After I had with great labour and difficulty got to the top, I saw my fate to my great affliction. Which was that I was on an island environed every way with the sea, no land to be seen, except some rocks, which lay a great way off, and two small islands less than this, which lay about three leagues to the west.

So again, look at the coordinates. So, he's obviously despairing because there's no land around and he's literally in the middle of the sea. but he can find the coordinates, he is using his epistemic mechanism, epistemic you know apparatus to map what is where and he is measuring the distance you will see, he is measuring the direction as well. I found also that the island I was in was barren and as I saw good reason to believe uninhabited, except by wild bees, of whom, however, I saw none. Yet I saw an abundance of fowls, but knew not their kinds, neither, when I killed them, could I tell what was fit for food and what not. At my coming back, I shot at a great bird which I saw sitting upon a tree on the side of a great wood. I believe it was the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world. Now, I wanted to say, I wanted to spend some time on this particular sentence. I believe it was the first gun that had been fired there since the creation of the world. The arrival of the gun, the arrival of the sound of gun, the arrival of the ammunition of gun is a very symbolic arrival, is the arrival of the white man, is a birth of imperialism in many senses is a birth of capitalism in many senses.

And this is a classic case of territorialization and notice how this is done very symbolically and also in a very, very acoustic way, right. So, we have this sort of very sonic symbolism of the gun. So, the first time I believe that anyone this gun sound was heard in this island. So, this marks the arrival, the marks the birth of a certain kind of

human subjectivity, a certain kind of human control, a certain kind of territorial control if you will. So, this sentence is important. I had no sooner fired, but from all the parts of the wood there arose an innumerable number of fowls of many sorts, making a confused screaming, and crying everyone according to his usual note. But not one of them of any kind that I knew. So, he doesn't know the names of any of the island birds or beasts. But they are beginning to clamour. They are beginning to get obviously very, very flabbergasted and confused and perhaps scared because no one has ever heard a gun sound in this island before. As for the creature I killed, I took it to be a kind of a hawk, its color and beak resembling it, but it had no talons or claws more than common. Its flesh was carrion and fit for nothing. So, now, again, notice how this is where the culture of commodification also comes in. This bit that he says in the end, fit for nothing. not usable in any way, not consumable, not usable, not recyclable, not reusable. So, what we have over here, very symbolically speaking, with the arrival of the gun, with the arrival of the gun sound, with the arrival of the gun powder, is also the arrival of a certain kind of culture of functionality, a culture of usability, a culture of commodity, in other words. And what's a commodity? Commodity is something, an object which has a use value, which has a price associated with the use value. Now there was no commodity in his island before. So, Crusoe comes, the white human subject comes and he begins to commodify everything around him. So, he is figuring out what is useful or what is not useful.

And this classification of the commodity versus the non-commodity is interesting symbolically as well as culturally because this is exactly how imperialism and capitalism began to happen outside of the European continent. This is obviously outside of the European continent. away from the continent as Crusoe figures out quite quickly but at the same time he is trying to impose or project the value system of the continent in terms of determining what is usable, what is not usable. So, in other words the ontology of the commodity, the birth of the commodities happening over here in this you know no place as it were which begins to become Crusoe's island. So again, the island itself becomes a commodity because it is owned by someone and very soon you will find the way Crusoe begins to map the island, you know, it becomes some kind of a cartographic construct.

He knows what is in the west, what is in the east and he has an absolutely god gaze about what is going on in different parts of the island. But at the same time, you will find that he begins to make the island productive in quality. He begins to grow plants, he begins to grow animals, he begins to have some kind of a plantation which may be seen as a metaphor of the birth of the empire, you know, the one human subject, one white human subject increasingly controlling the objects and the other living forms in the island and converting those into commodities. Whatever is usable is used and whatever is non-usable is disposed away and so on and so forth. But you know the whole idea of commodification is beginning to happen. Contented with his discovery, now that he's got a gaze of the island, I came back to my raft and fell to work to bring my cargo on shore. So, he's going to bring all his cargo on the shore. The sinking ship very conveniently has a lot of things like food and gunpowder which Crusoe will find very useful. Which took me up the rest of the day, and what to do with myself at night I knew not, nor indeed where to rest.

For I was afraid to lie down on the ground, not knowing but some wild beast might devour me. Though, as I afterwards found, there was really no need for those fears. However, As well as I could, I barricaded myself round with the chests and boats that I had brought on shore, and made a kind of a hut for that night's lodging. As for food, I yet saw not which way to supply myself, except that I had seen two or three creatures, like hares, run out of the wood where I shot the fowl." Right, so this is a survival story in many ways. I mean, this is a survival story of a man who was shipwrecked on an island. But at the same time, we see how the survival became, begins to become some kind of an expansionist enterprise where he begins to acquire more and more things. He begins to acquire, you know, make a distinction between object and commodity and in the process begins to acquire complete control of this otherwise, you know, otherworldly space. Right. So, we will move on a little bit and we will come to the section where yeah. the money bit, right. So, this is page 32 which should be on the screen.

This is interesting bit because we just talked about commodity and this is a bit where

Crusoe discovers there is some money on the ship that he can find. Now the reason why I am choosing this section, as you can see I am carefully choosing certain sections and skipping certain other sections because we are trying to create a narrative through which we can study this novel. So there are different things you can use and we just talked about the ontology of usability in the story, what is useful and what is not useful in this particular context and looks at a money that he finds in the ship and he realizes and he, you know, very derisively says, addresses the money and says, well, it's completely useless because, you know, where is the purchase value? Where is the culture of purchase over here? There's absolutely nothing to purchase. So, money is the most useless commodity in this particular space. So, he finds on a distributed screen, I yet discovered a locker with drawers in it, in one of which I found two or three razors, and one pair of large scissors, with some ten or a dozen of good knives and forks.

In another, I found about thirty-six pounds value in money, some European coins, some Brazil, some pieces of eight, some gold, some silver. I smiled to myself at the sight of this money. O drug, said I aloud, what art thou good for? Thou art not worth to me. No, nor the taking off of the ground. One of the knives is worth all this heap. I have no manner of use for thee. Even remain where thou art, and go to the bottom as a creature whose life is not worth having. Very interestingly, look at the way in which the language suddenly becomes very Latin, suddenly becomes you know almost biblical in quality etc. And we have talked about how the very Christian biblical vocabulary is used in certain points in the story, particularly in conjunction with money, particularly in conjunction with capital. So, we find this how the language switches, you know, the linguistic switch, you know, begins to happen in different kind of episodic contexts and different kinds of emotional episodic contexts. And this is a very good case in point because he's looking at the money here. And certainly, he's addressing that from, you know, using a very biblical Christian vocabulary. But at the same time, he's also making the point very clearly that one of these knives is worth much more than all these heaps of money that we have over here, right?

So, it's not worth saving. So, you know, he has figured out the whole idea, the whole relativity of use, you know, what is usable in a certain context is not usable in certain other contexts. And again, look at the way in which the space determines value, the space determines usability. So, if this had been London, if this had been Brazil, if this had been some part of the quote-unquote continent, obviously this was a lot of money. But given that he is in a shipwrecked island, he is shipwrecked and he is on an island in the middle of nowhere, what use is this money to him? And he is using a very biblical Christian, you know, high vocabulary to, to, to comment on that. But this is interesting, almost funny bit. However, upon second thoughts, I took it away. So, he doesn't let, let it go. I mean, what if it comes in handy later? So, he takes away the money, knowing fully well it is useless where he is currently. And wrapping all this in a piece of canvas, I began to think of making another raft. But while I was preparing it, I found the sky overcast and the wind began to rise. And in a quarter of an hour, I blew a fresh gale from the shore. It presently occurred to me that it was in vain to pretend to make a raft with the wind offshore and that it was my business to be gone before the tide of flood began.

Otherwise, I might not be able to reach the shore at all. Accordingly, I let myself drown into the water and swam across the channel, which lay between the ship and the sands. and even that with great difficulty enough, partly with the weight of the things I had about me, and partly the roughness of the water, for the wind rose very hastily, and before it was quite high water, it blew a storm. So, he is bringing back all the usable things to the island from the ship and you can see how his body behavior, his motor behavior is changing depending on the nature of the elements. Now we come to page 33 which is one of the first times in a novel where the word savages occurs and we will you know look at it in more details in a different section in the next class but now that it's gone to the ship and acquired some usable things, some commodities which can be of use to him. The immediate next thing is that how shall I protect this, now that I have some goods with me, some commodities with me, some objects with me which have some value and some price. The next thing is how to protect those things against potential attack from savages and again the word savage here is very, very important and very political in many ways because Pretty much anyone who's outside the white male human

subject is a savage over here, someone who cannot be relied or cannot be trusted. Okay, so this should be on your screen. My thoughts were now wholly employed about securing myself against either savages, if any should appear, or wild beasts, if anywhere in the island.

And I had many thoughts of the method how to do this, and what kind of dwelling to make, whether I should make me a cave on the earth, or a tent upon the earth, and in short, I resolved upon both, the manner and description of which it may not be improper to give an account for. To give an account for. So, this bookkeeping quality, this journalistic quality of the novel begins to become important because it's giving a very detailed description of what he did. Now, I'll spend a little bit of time here. This may be a little bit of a digression, but I think it's a useful way to connect to the narrative strategy over here. What we are seeing here is classic realism, right, classic, classic realism, where there is this first-person narrator, but he seems to know everything that happens. He seems to know, you know, have all the knowledge of the before, now and the after.

He almost has an omnipotent, omnipresent gaze upon you know where he is and he seems to remember everything that he did on the island despite the fact this happened many years ago. So, he is giving you a very detailed journalistic description of what happened to him and he is giving it almost like a bookkeeping thing and which should you know be very, very clear in a very direct way he is making up. distinctions between the good and the bad. Now occasionally the novel makes a language switch, a linguistic switch and becomes very biblical in quality, very Christian in quality. But we find how the religious tone, the religious rhetoric that a novel espouses sometimes is very interestingly collusive with the protection of the capital, with the protection of the acquiring objects, the commodities in certain ways, right. So, there is this language of othering which is also taking place. So, the religious rhetoric, the existential rhetoric is also directed to create the sense of othering, the self and the other, which has been created constantly in this novel, right. So, there is Crusoe, the white male subject, and there are the others, the fowl and the bees and the savages, who is outside of that particular territorial perimeter. And when I say territorial perimeter, I just don't mean the place or

the geographical place, but also the civilizational place, the civilizational space, the civilizational territory. So, we can see how territory becomes very political over here. It is physical, it is corporeal, but at the same time it is quite political, right. So, as he says over here, I consulted several things in my situation, which I found to be proper for me. First, held in fresh water, I just now mentioned. Secondly, shelter from the heat of the sun.

Thirdly, security from the ravenous creatures, whether men or beasts. Now, look at the way in which men or beasts are mingled together, talked about as if they are interchangeable. Whoever is a ravenous creature, in other words, whoever is a non-white subject, may be compared to a beast. So, again, the whole idea of the beast or the savage is a classic case of othering. So, our language here is designed to other the subjects. Fourthly, a view to the sea, that if God sent any ship in sight, I might not lose any advantage for my deliverance, of which I was not willing to banish all my expectation yet. Right. So, these are different directions he is trying to make. These are different kind of gazes he's trying to acquire. Now, I'll skip a little bit. And there are these very detailed description of how he makes a tent, how he makes his habitation and how he makes begins to do this bookkeeping in terms of how good things happen to him and bad things happen to him. So, I am going to skip to that portion directly where he is giving us a log, a log book essentially in terms of you know what is happening with him and you know the chapter is called Crusoe considers. So, as you can see it is written on the top of the screen Crusoe considers a thinking white man, and how the thinking white man also becomes the surviving white man and how survival depends on thinking processes. Now, so this is a bit that I thought would be interesting for us. And this is a bookkeeping bit which also espouses a Christian vocabulary sometimes, a very religious vocabulary sometimes. But the whole plan, the whole design here is to maintain this very classified account of what is going on, the good things and the bad things, the benevolent things and the evil things and destructive things and the constructive things. I now began to consider seriously my condition and the circumstance I was reduced to.

And I drew up this trade of my affairs in writing. So, again you know this whole idea of writing it down, the whole idea of giving a very journalistic account, in other words

classifying what is going on, right. So, in terms of giving it a name, giving it a uniformity to give a name, a symbol to what is going on, the objects around them, the events around them, etc. not so much to leave them to any that were to come after me, for I was like to have but few heirs, as to deliver my thoughts from daily pouring upon them and afflicting my mind. So, this also becomes some kind of a survival strategy, you know, some kind of a self-sustaining thing, right, self-preservation technique. So, writing becomes a self-preservation technique in a certain sense, because you are writing out your experiences and giving it a body. So, essentially writing here becomes a form of corporalizing your experiences, giving it a corporeal quality, giving it a name, a language, a design, a symbol. And as my reason began now to master my despondency, I began to comfort myself as well as I could, and to set the good against the evil. So again, look at the binary over here, the self and the other, the good and the evil, the white and the non-white, etc. that I might have something to distinguish my case from worse. And I stated it very impartially, like debtor and creditor. So just in case there was any doubt in your mind, this is a bookkeeping logic, debtor and a creditor. Now, again, I'm saying this again and again, but I think it's important to reiterate this. The Christian vocabulary, the biblical vocabulary, the Protestant vocabulary is absolutely hand in glove. It's absolutely connected to the debtor and creditor vocabulary, right? Which means that this is the.

.. beginning of the Protestant ethic of capitalism, which maintains a log, which maintains a bookkeeping journal, which maintains a debt and a credit classification, at the same time using the language, which is, you know, biblical in quality, you know, very frequently. And this is a log book that he offers us. Evil, I am cast upon a horrible, desolate island, void of all hope of recovery. Good, but I am alive and not drowned, as all my ship's company was. Evil, I am singled out and separated, as it were, from all the world to be miserable. good but I'm singled out too from all the ship's crew to be spared from death and he that miraculously saved me from death can deliver me from this condition. So again, very very Christian you know the rhetoric is very religious in quality at the same time it is a rhetoric of debt and credit. I'm divided from mankind a solitary one banished from human society but I'm not starved and perishing on a barren place, affording no sustenance. I have not clothes to cover me, but I'm in a hot climate, where if

I had clothes, I could hardly wear them. Very pragmatic, very utilitarian, if you will. I'm without any defence or means to resist any violence of man or beast, but I'm cast on an island where I see no wild beast to hurt me, as I saw on the coast of Africa, and what if I had been shipwrecked there? I have no soul to speak to to relieve me or relieve me, but God wonderfully sent the ship in near enough to the shore that I have gotten out so many necessary things as will either supply my wants or enable me to supply myself even as long as I live. So, at the same time look at the way in which God is used as some kind of an instrument to deliver capital, to deliver the commodity. So, God is thanked for making sure the ship sank close enough to the island just so he can get the necessary things, necessary commodities, necessary objects that will supply him as long as he lives. I will stop at this point today but I think what we are trying to establish over here is how the religious rhetoric, the divine rhetoric, you know the very Christian rhetoric which is Protestant in quality is used and instrumentalized in many ways to essentially create or design a debt and credit structure, a capitalist structure and this is why we can see how the cultural, the very complex cultural condition of Robinson Crusoe The culture from which it emerges begins to be reflected in the fictional framework that Daniel Defoe is offering us. So we will stop at this point today and we will continue with the next session in the text. Thank you for your attention.