

Course Name: The Novel and Change

Professor Name: Dr. Avishek Parui

Department Name: Department of Humanities and Social Sciences

Institute Name: IIT Madras

Week – 02

Lecture 9

Hello and welcome to this NPTEL course titled The Novel and Change. We will continue the discussion about the cultural context which produced the text Robinson Crusoe. So, you'll remember we started reading Jan Ward's The Rise of the Novel where we spent some time in the previous sessions looking at the rise of formal realism as a narrative technique. In the early stages of the novel and how that was very interestingly corresponding with the material cultural conditions of its times. So very quickly, the realistic technique that was espoused by the novelists at that time was an interesting departure from the earlier techniques of idyllic pastoral romances, pastoral epic traditions of narration. In contrast to that, realism was more oriented towards dailyness, towards everydayness, towards the atomic changes happening around the subject, the experiencing subject, the experiential subject. So, experience, affect, domesticity, dailyness, these become very, very interesting components of realism. And we see how this gets played out in Robinson Crusoe, we saw that while reading the text, how we have a very granular description of Crusoe's account, very experiential account in the novel. In terms of how he engages with the space and time around him, how he engages with the materials around him. So, the materiality of the environment around him becomes a very important factor which in a way shapes the narrative technique as well as the plot of Robinson Crusoe. So, in this session we will jump directly into what's reading of Robinson Crusoe and this should be on your screen, why he is talking about individualism and the novel. So, the whole idea of the individual subject, so that is again one very important factor we have to consider because when looking at realism there is this clear move or transition from the collective to the individual. There is this historical cultural setting of course and if you remember I used the X axis Y axis example in the previous sessions where we talked about how there is this horizontal movement where there is a historical setting, a geographical setting, a cultural setting, a

temporal setting. But at the same time, there is this vertical movement where you are invited as a reader to enter the consciousness of the speaker, the subconscious of the speaker, the feeling mind in other words.

So, there is very intersectional quality about realism where it is also traversing real coordinates of space and time as well as inviting us for a journey, into a journey into the mind of the narrator, the mind of the subject. So, individualism becomes a very important factor. In Robinson Crusoe as well as in the other novels that Wirtz discussed over here, examples of former realism, where the individual subject who is situated in a cultural context, so the situatedness is important, there is this backdrop, the cultural background, the setting, the historical setting etc. At the same time, what is foregrounded is the individuality, the unique experiential subject from which the focal position from which the story is being told, the plot is unravelled from that position. So, focalisation becomes an important factor over here. So, this particular section engages with the idea of individualism and the novel and specifically apropos of what happens in Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe. So, this should be on the screen. The novel's serious concern with the daily lives of ordinary people seems to depend upon two important general conditions. So again, we see the words here are important, the adjectives are important. Ordinary people, so realism is a story about ordinary people, it's about ordinariness, ordinary materials, ordinary objects. So, it's nothing extraordinary or grandiose about the novel.

So we discussed this in the previous classes as well, where we saw how, this is a very interesting transition, a very interesting departure from the epic tradition where the epic inhabits the larger-than-life scale, epic inhabits the metaphysical almost transcendental dimension sometimes where there is this huge hyperbolic quality about the actions and the plots and the characters. Now, in contrast to that, the novel is more secular, the novel is more inclusive, the novel is more ordinary, more daily, more, more custodian in quality, right? There is this slow dailiness about the novel, this slow custodian quality about the novel which makes it very interesting. And this is why former realism or classic realism lends itself very uniquely as a narrative framework. So, ordinariness and ordinary people are very important over here because that is the core of what the former real estate technique is trying to achieve. So, the society must value, so two important conditions,

society must value every individual highly. So, there is this democratic, egalitarian, secular quality about the novel. The society must value every individual highly enough to consider him a proper subject of serious literature and there must be enough variety of belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, the readers of the novels. So, in other words, the novel is a tradition in storytelling about ordinary people for ordinary people. The readers also we have to importantly understand here, the readers of the novel are the new mercantile classes, the ordinary people who are consuming this cultural artefact of the novel you know coming out of printing press. So, again the material conditions become important.

So, this is a time where print becomes important. Novels can be written, printed, circulated, you know consumed as a proper market thing. not very dissimilar, shall we say, with let us say cinema, not very dissimilar with popular cinema. So, novels are written for popular things, you know, for popular people. So, for ordinary people, about ordinary people, right. So, these are the conditions which are very, very important that individual must have a lot of importance. So, individual must be important enough to be considered as a subject of the novel. It does not require an epic hero anymore. It doesn't require an extraordinary hero anymore. It just can be an everyman and everyman can be the subject of the novel, can be the protagonist of the novel. I mean, for example, Crusoe in Daniel Defoe's novel I mean he has no supernatural powers, he is not a superman. He is a very common man, a sailor, you know someone who is born in an ordinary middle-class family, wants to run away, wants to make a life for himself, the typical ordinary aspiring middle class, right. And so that is the protagonist of the novel. At the same time the other important thing is there must be enough belief and action among ordinary people for a detailed account of them to be of interest to other ordinary people, right. There should be interest in ordinariness. There should be interest in dailiness. Which is why the novel becomes popular because people want to read about men and women like them. People want to read about relatable characters. So, relatability becomes an important factor in this point of time. So, the readers of a novel, that's also very important.

The readers of a novel are ordinary men and women who want to read about other ordinary

men and women. It is probable that neither of these conditions for the existence of the novel obtained very widely until fairly recently, because the both depend on the rise of a society characterized by that vast complex of interdependent factors denoted by the term individualism. So, individualism is the importance given to the individual subject, not royalty, not a deity, not divinity. by the ordinary man, the individualism, the uniqueness of the ordinary man. So that cultural condition must be achieved and Watt says that that was achieved only fairly recently, right. So, there is a slow process of egalitarianism, a slow process of democratization which saw the move, shall we say, between the transition from the metaphysical, from the royal, from the monarchy to the ordinary people and the novel captures and calibrates the transition in very complex ways. Even the word is recent, dating only from the middle of the 19th century. In all ages, no doubt, and in all societies, some people have been individualistic.

So, he talks about now the word individual over here, right. And remember, we also discussed, I mean, in following what's reading, that a word novel also, it implies within it something new, something radically different. So, novelty, for example, you know, so novel and newness. those become very interestingly organically connected, semantically connected. So some people have been individualistic in a sense that they were egocentric, unique or conspicuously independent of current appearance and habits. But the concept of individualism involves much more than this. We are not just talking about individualism as being know unique eccentric quality of one individual. So, this is much more than that and again I I request you go back to my example of the x-axis y-axis. So, individualism here is an intersectional category right. It is both a collective quality where there is this collective interest to know more about the individual. At the same time, it is also a vertical you know individualistic category where there is you know something unique about one individual. But the individual is also situated in a matrix of materiality, in a matrix of cultural condition etc. So, there is this horizontal quality as well as the vertical quality, the intersectionality about individualism is what Ian Watt is talking about, alluding to here. It posits a whole society mainly governed by the idea of every individual's intrinsic independence both from other individuals and from that multifarious allegiance to the past modes of thought and action denoted by the word tradition, a force that is always social, not individual. So, there is this very interesting dual bi-temporal, bi-directional quality

about the individual here. One is obviously it is a society where there is intrinsic independence from other individuals. So, every individual has the liberty, has the liberty or the agency to move ahead the way they want and also there is that freedom from what is traditionally known as the conservative traditional template.

So there is this agency, the will, the ability to move away from that, you know that option, the choice is available. Now take this back and map it back and dial back to what happens in Robinson Crusoe at the beginning of the novel. So, there is this very conservative father figure who forbids Crusoe from going to the sea, who forbids his son from doing something that is against the collective will of the family and the society and yet the son has the agency to do it. He disobeys his father he becomes his prodigal son and he goes away to the sea. So, this is a cultural condition where this choice is available. And of course, Crusoe spends a lot of time talking about how unwise the choice was and the vocabulary becomes very Christian, very religious. So, he is sort of masquerading it through a very religious rhetoric as well. But what is happening over here is this very interesting productive tension, shall we say, between the conservative collective template and the intrinsic individual template. And the productive tension is bidirectional in quality. The existence of such a society in turn obviously depends on a special type of economic and political organization and on an appropriate ideology, more specifically on an economic and political organization which allows its members, the word allow is important, which allows its members a very wide range of choices in their actions and on an ideology primarily based not on the tradition of the past but on the autonomy of the individual.

The autonomy is important over here, the choice, the self-sufficient quality of the individual and again self-sufficiency is a very important factor in Robinson Crusoe. How he is able to sustain himself materially, mentally, emotionally in a barren island, in a deserted island, not a barren, a deserted island, right. And the whole story may be seen as a metaphor, as a classic test of self-sustenance, right? So, the self-sustaining individual, self-sustaining subject who pushes against all odds and achieves it, often at a great cost of his individual, you know, personal health. But this is exactly where individuality is over here. The subject's ability to sustain themselves against all odds. And this is connected to

the autonomy. So, the autonomy of the individual irrespective of his particular social status or personal capacity. It is generally agreed that modern society is uniquely individualistic in these respects and that of the many historical causes for its emergence too, are of supreme importance. Now what is historicizing the rise of individualism? So what again I mean we know this by now and I am aware that I am addressing most of you who come from background of cultural studies, literature but sociology, anthropology you would know I am sure you do that when you talk about philosophy or you know any kind of a discursive template like individualism, it always emerges from a certain material condition, doesn't happen immediately or just rapidly or randomly out of thin air. There are some very, very deep-seated material, cultural, philosophical, religious, economic conditions which shape certain forms of tenets, which shape certain forms of belief systems. Now what here is identifying two such big factors which gave rise to what we call individualism in Western societies. What are those? rise of modern industrial capitalism and a spread of Protestantism, especially in its Calvinistic or Puritan forms. So, capitalism and Protestantism. So, these two have become very, very important factors in terms of the freedom and the autonomy of the individual in modern Western Europe, which is a setting that what is talking about, which is a setting that we are also looking at in terms of the rise of the novel because we are looking at how the novel is also reflective of the historical, cultural, social, moral, discursive economic changes which are happening around that time.

So, the rise of the modern industrial capitalism which is exactly what happens in Robinson Crusoe but is also couched, that rise is also couched in terms of its vocabulary, its language, its rhetoric would have spread up Protestantism. So, the Protestant work ethic for instance, right? So, work hard, innovate yourself and there will be rewards in the end etc. So, this entire value system based on hard work, the entire aspirational economy which is built around hard work is something which comes from this interesting collusion shall we say, between industrial capitalism and the spread of Protestantism, especially and what is identifying this, underlining this very vigorously, especially in this Calvinist or Puritan forms of Protestantism, right. This is the exact interesting collusion that we see in Robinson Crusoe as well. If you remember we discussed how there are some interesting passages in Robinson Crusoe where bookkeeping, husbandry, protection of the farm, creation of a log

and all these things are described in very Christian terms, in very very Calvinistic terms shall we say and it's not an accident at all and what here is identifying why this is happening in Defoe's novel. And what is it reflective of? It's reflective of the social changes, the cultural, religious changes happening around that time, which are also in very interesting ways hand in glove or collusive to the economic changes happening around that time as well where the market is opening up, the modern, the common man can also make it big. So, this is basically some kind of a precursor of what was known later as the American dream that if you work hard enough you can make it big in life, if you work hard enough then you can also be a wealthy person. Doesn't matter what your background is, doesn't matter whether you are born in the royalty or born into an ordinary family. So, the ordinary can also become extraordinary, which is why the story of the ordinary man becomes important, the Rex Richards story, the common man story. And we see this, what happens in Robinson Crusoe, the common man becoming uncommon, the ordinary man become extraordinary, finding success, going through hard work, going through this almost in a purgatorial process through which he keeps pushing towards the mark, keeps pushing towards his desired destination and in the end, he finds it, in the end he becomes successful, achieves success. So you find this basic template of the story is recycled again and again in different versions even when it comes to let's say popular cinema, contemporary cinema, popular cinema.

So, this is exactly what you know travels all the way into Hollywood becoming this ordinary man, becoming extraordinary through hard work, through work ethic, little bit of luck, little bit of divine intervention but at the same time it is all very interestingly mixed up seamlessly. So, you know divine intervention, good luck, at the same time hard work and the ethic of hard work all come together to produce this really interesting alchemy, shall we say, through which success may be achieved. So, you know, it's very much, let's say, to give you a very popular example, the Rocky story, the Rocky Balboa story, you know, that ordinary boxer becomes extraordinary through hard work, through going through that very, very difficult, laborious process, So, in a very structural, sentimental sense, there isn't much of a difference between what happens in Robinson Crusoe and what happens in a film like Rocky, right, which is sort of 1960s, 70s, I believe, where, you know,

again, it becomes the excellent example of the American dream, you know, the rags to riches story. But this is what we see happening, beginning to happen around the 17th century, 18th century, with the rise of the merchant class, the rise of the mercantile class, you know, all in need is a little bit of money and the adventure, the appetite for adventure with which you can break away from your templates, break away from your family and go sail into the wild seas with the hope of finding your fortune. Now, Watt spends a little bit of time and we will wind up with this section now, but he spends a little bit of time talking about capitalism. So, what is industrial capitalism and why is it important in terms of our understanding, a more nuanced understanding of Robinson Crusoe. So, capitalism brought a great increase of economic specialization and this combined with a less rigid and homogeneous social structure and a less absolutist and more democratic political system very very important word less homogeneous and more democratic right less rigid less absolutist right so it becomes more gray it becomes more relative in quality it becomes more ambivalent in quality so there's a lot of ambivalence in Robinson Crusoe as well He is morally unsure whether he is doing the right thing by leaving his home.

Of course, he is becoming wealthy and rich and he ends up becoming a super wealthy person. But at the same time, he is also carrying this very Christian guilt of breaking away from his father, of going against his father's wishes etc. So that ambivalence, that ambiguity, the moral ambiguity is very visibly there, very conspicuously present in Robinson Crusoe. But what it also means is that there is a less absolutist view of the world and a more relativistic view of the world, okay. Now all these social changes, belief system changes, faith system changes, ideological changes, what it does is it enormously increase the individual's freedom of choice. So, choice becomes the main currency in capitalism. So you have the choice to make a change, you have the choice to make it big, you have the choice to disobey. You have the choice to subvert, right? So, agency becomes a very important factor. So, no longer are you predestined to work in a certain way because your father was something. You have the choice to break away from that model. If your father was a tradesman, you can become a sailor or something else. So, it is an open market of choice. So, again, what we are seeing here is how the economy and the economy of choice are coming together in very interesting ways and there is this proper religious principle,

proper theological, philosophical changes happening around that time which are facilitating that change, facilitating that transition, okay. So, the freedom of choice becomes the currency over here. For those fully exposed to the new economic order, the effective entity on which social arrangements were now based was no longer the family, nor the church, nor the guild, nor the township. nor any other collective unit, but the individual.

He alone was primarily responsible for determining his own economic, social, political and religious roles. So, this is exactly what, you know, what happens in Crusoe in many ways. There is a clear departure from the collective quality and the entire story about one lonely subject, one single subject sustaining himself and, you know, making it big in the end, having completely departed from the family, departed from the church, departed from the guild, departed from all kinds of collective entities and the success story which happens in the end is a testimony to what is happening and it's very complex and reflective of what is happening at a social level. So, this is why I decided to pick Robinson Crusoe as a novel. I mean, first of all, it's a very early novel. It gives you a very good flavor of what the novel was at its very inception phase. But at the same time, it also becomes a classic example of how a piece of fiction, a work of fiction is so interestingly organically connected to the social changes happening around that time, the moral changes happening around that time. So, the transitions in economy, the transitions in religion, the transitions in moral, ideological, theological arguments, which are happening around that time and how the novel which is the work of fiction is complexly correspondent to that in terms of reflecting it through the individual subject becomes a very very important factor. Right, so we will skip a little bit now and we will come to what happens in Robinson Crusoe specifically and before that what is Defoe's position, Daniel Defoe's position over here and this should be on your screen. Defoe, whose philosophical outlook has much in common with that of the English empiricists of the 17th century, so we talk about John Locke for example, empiricist or empiricism is that the philosophy which gives primacy to thought processes, the associative process of thought processes, right.

Expressed the diverse elements of individualism more completely than any previous writer, and his work offers a unique demonstration of the connection between individualism in its many forms and the rise of the novel. disconnection is shown particularly clearly and comprehensively in his first novel Robinson Crusoe. So, we stop at this point, in the subsequent sessions we will look specifically what happens in Robinson Crusoe in the wake of how you studied it of course and how that is very interestingly reflective of the changes, the transitions, the model, philosophical, intellectual, religious, economic transitions happening around that time and how it It helps us to dial back in many ways to the works of John Locke, to the works of Newton. We discussed how Newtonian physics has a very important role to play because this is a time when we are able to calibrate motion, this is the time we are able to you know society an ordinary person has a knowledge about motion, has a knowledge about how objects move, how objects matter, how matter moves in certain spaces, in certain situations and we are able to calibrate these in interesting details, right. So objects become important, ordinary objects become important because we can study ordinary objects through movements, through the entire field around those objects, right. And of course we have these interesting philosophical discourses on thought processes, associative thought processes, which are reflected in the writings of someone like John Locke.

And again, Crusoe was speaking from that tradition. So, the entire novel Robinson Crusoe may be situated in this very complex diachronic moment, movement as well as moment where all these different economic, social, cultural, intellectual, philosophical changes are taking place. And the realism in Robinson Crusoe is also reflective of that diachronic movement, that entanglement, shall we say, of different material, cultural, intellectual traditions. So, we'll stop at this point today and we'll continue in subsequent sessions looking specifically at what happens in the novel as studied by Watt and how it is very complex and reflective of the social changes that are happening around that time. In a way, how it is reflective of it, at the same time, also how it connects and becomes relevant in contemporary times as well. So how is Robinson Crusoe for example, I have already mentioned Rocky for example, but how is it still relevant in many ways, in more complex ways in terms of how we look at the individual, the suffering subject, endurance and the

whole economy of belief systems, economy of faith systems, economy of valencies, values given to objects right and how it connects to the financial economy in terms of liberation, aspiration, subversion etc. So, we will talk about all those. We read the text specifically in the subsequent classes. Thank you for your attention.