

Introduction to World Literature
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Poetics of Aristotle-II

Hello and welcome to today's session of the NPTEL course title introduction to world literature. So we are looking at one of the iconic text which is now classified as part of the criticism poetics by Aristotle. And as we already know this is one of those texts which also laid the foundations of Western critical thought. And if you are familiar with literary criticism you will also know that Aristotle's system of tragedy something which gave a shape a refinement to the understanding of literature from the earlier centuries onwards.

So we will start looking at Aristotle system of tragedy in particular though he had written on a wide range of topics and he was (())(0:49) rhetoric was considered as the supreme form of art, as a supreme form of expression and as we know there is also a way in which the Aristotle the way of looking literature, looking at art it also has laid the foundation of an entire kind of tradition.

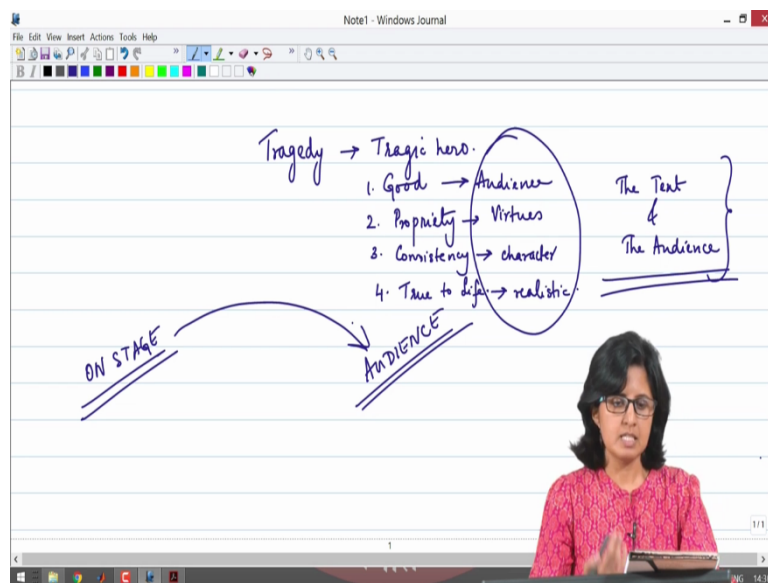
Aristotle in (())(1:04) add the kind of world views that it held those are some of the things perhaps we would have the time to come back and take a look at it later point. So in today's session the focus is on understanding Aristotle system of tragedy as he has laid them out in his work the poetics. So if you're familiar with the poetics if you take a look at that work which is also available freely online.

You would get to know that there is a way in which it comes across as lecture notes as notes taken by the student and we have there is a fairly a good amount of conjecture to believe that. Aristotle's work, politics, it's largely comes across as set of discussion, set of discourses that he had with his students. It's in the form of very illicit dialogue it's in the form of a very illicit discussion where he engages with the macro and micro at the same time.

He engages with the questions which are important for the reader for the audience for the the actors who are on the stage, the ones who are writing the play, so it's a very holistic kind of an account through which we find a system of tragedy if it's emerging. To know the importance of Aristotle in system of tragedy, it would perhaps suffice to notice that until the 15th a 16th century the entire idea of tragedy the entire tradition of theatre itself was predominantly governed by the rules that supposedly poetics and Aristotle's works had put forward.

For instance when Shakespeare started writing in the 16th century, 16th and the earlier 17th century in Britain he had to move away from the Aristotle (1)(2:50) to make a different mark altogether but the departure is very very significant and also most of the fundamental things that we talk about in terms of theatre, in terms of tragedy, in terms of drama it is a great deal to the precepts laid down by Aristotle and the framework, the overall framework that he had given the system of drama, system of literature, system of tragedy in particular and this we find his work poetics and one of the centric things that he begins looking at is the idea of the tragic hero and the tragedy.

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And it also backs the question why Aristotle chose to look at tragedy in the first place. During those times tragedy was considered as the supreme form of any kind of literary expression and we find that in the Greek worldview, and the Greek tradition system there is a great deal of focus which has been given on tragedy, on drama and particularly on the emotions which tragedy had, liked the audience too.

So coming back to look at the idea of the tragic hero, we find that Aristotle had a clear idea of how the tragic hero needs to be recession, how he needs to be framed to within any particular work. So there are 4 necessary qualities that he identifies in the persona of a tragic hero and here we find Aristotle adopting a very scientific approach. We find him doing a kind of a categorization.

We find him approaching this abstract idea of art and literature in a very methodical way by categorizing things by looking at it like a scientist like a naturalist and we find the scientific

approach by coming extremely useful even today when we look at Aristotle's work and when we look at the literary criticism in the larger sense, so in that sense I also wanted to keep in mind that the methods that we talk about today.

The methodology that one finds extremely important in focus in defining in positioning any kind of about any kind of academic literary critical work, it the foundations of that could be traced back to the methods adopted by Aristotle in the first century BC, so there are 4 qualities that he considers necessary as far as the hero is concerned.

The first one being the tragic hero should be good and the 2nd one is about propriety, thirdly he talks about consistency and fourthly about being true to life. So when we look at these aspects one by one it begins to make more sense. When Aristotle says a tragic hero must be good, the intention is that, the audience will be able to feel for the tragic hero.

Of course the tragic hero situated within a tragedy means that there is some tragedy which is about to befall tragic hero. So in order to in order to elicit sympathy from the audience, it is very very important that this hero to him misfortune is before he also needs to be of good stature, he also needs to be really good for us to be able to, for the audience to be able to sympathize with him, to empathize with him.

So unless the audience feel for the tragic hero there is no way in which the tragedy, the essence of it is going to work. So right in the outset we find that Aristotle has the audience at the feeling of the audience, the emotions that the audience had to go at the center of his concept, at the center of his (6:49) and secondly he talks about the priority and here he is talking about the virtues that are appropriate to reach character.

And he also assigned certain kinds of virtues to particular characters in accordance with the that I character, the position of the character, the hierarchy and even in terms of gender for example we find that he he had attributed quality such as nurture, care, family etc. to women and also quality such as justice, valour and honor to men. So there is a certain kind of hierarchy and certain kind of order that he insist on having which he also believed where the order of nature, it was natural.

Of course there are many ways in which one can contested from the contemporary points of view but the intention now is to look at how Aristotle has positioned propriety in his works. So accordingly you'll find that when he's talking about tragic hero, it is also the kind of person, the kind of hero who behaves in a way that is expected of his character of his

position, so there is a certain virtues which are associated with the tragic hero and unless the tragic hero is presented in that way again the audience may not be able to feel for that character.

And 3rd he talks about consistency. And Aristotle was of the belief that and this is also a very humanistic attitude that there should be a consistent psychology present in each character. And in Aristotle system he did not really encouraged any significant character changes within the same way and he thought that it is flawed way in which a character is being constructed.

And most literary characters, if we look at it there is a way in which the consistency, quality of consistency can be found in those and here when I talk about the humanistic approach that Aristotle also had upheld, he was also a believer in the idea that human beings can essentially have only one kind of behavior are one kind of character and the switches across this behavior and characters were not seem to be very natural.

So for the same reason you expect that this tragic hero to show a consistency of character which of course was seen as a very commendable quality. So with consistency he means character which remains consistent throughout. And fourthly the tragic hero was expected to lead a life which came across as being very very realistic, so the audience Aristotle believed should be able to connect with a real-life and the tragic hero had to be a representative of the true world. There should be nothing outwardly about the way in which the character was presented.

So here we find that whether Aristotle is talking about the goodness inherent in the tragic hero or the propriety or consistency are being true to life, we find him focusing on these qualities which are very audience centric. It is all about how the tragic hero appears before the audience in order to elicit the kind of emotion that the playwright has in mind. Unless this basic fact was taken care of Aristotle also believe that the tragedy will not be effective. It will not have the desired effect on the audience.

And if the audience go through a series of emotions that they are supposed to go through when they're watching a tragedy, a tragedy cannot be deemed a success either. He also gives the examples of successful tragedies of those times to illustrate his view which we shall take a look at when we look at text in original.

So we move ahead with the understanding that Aristotle was concerned about the relationship between the text and the audience. We find this information most of his tenets, we find him

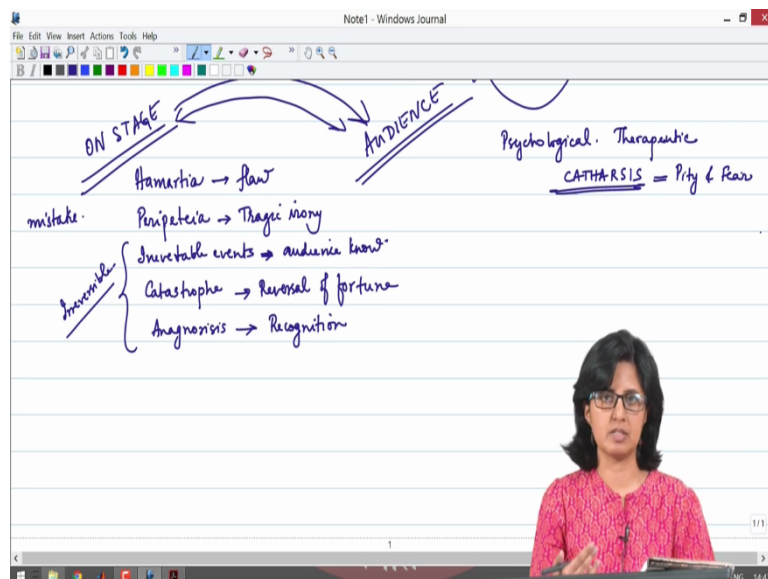
engaging with the text and the audience with a same kind of intensity and also it is very nuanced way in which this relation is being examined, explored and highlighted in particular ways.

So for the same reason Aristotle has also seen as one of the first critics who engaged with the reader. Who also in that sense can be co-opted into the various forms (11:14) response series of the contemporary.

In today's lecture as mentioned before we look at a particular aspect the system of tragedy as Aristotle had conceded and this was based on the successful plays of those times, particularly refers to (11:29). And there are 2 ways in which he begins to look at the system of tragedy. 2 ways in which he begins to define how I would tragedy can be identified and this works in 2 ways.

This could be a guideline for the readers for. It could also be a guideline for the ones who are aspiring to write to tragedy. So there are 2 things which happen simultaneously in Aristotle's perception that is something which happens on stage. As a result of responses that would be illustrated from the audience. So it is in this dialogue between what happens on stage and the responses of the audience that we find the real crux of tragedy happening, the real effect of tragedy are unfolding.

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So there is a process that he identifies as happening on stage and we will first note down the process and the different names for it and then move on to look at the details regarding the same. So this is what happens on stage. The first stage is that of Hamartia then Peripeteia then

there are series of inevitable events leading to catastrophe and finally Anagnorisis. So in multiple ways.

As we move ahead with this discussion we will also see that most the systems of tragedy can follow within this framework and is can be evident even in some of the movies that we see in the contemporary and we can see that the system of tragedy that Aristotle put forward biased on the successful tragedies of those times, it really comes of framework to understand literary works particularly tragedies written in the past as well as in the present.

And there is something about this framework, the structural framework that Aristotle talks about that it, of course there are text which are moved away from this but it definitely needs to be stated that this remains as (13:33) term as a standard Time framework from which one is required to depart. For instance in order to make sense of the departures that classic model the standard model that Aristotle had put forward it always gets mentioned.

So let's look at how this works. So the tragic hero if you can recall any of the tragedies that you're familiar with. You can also think about the plot structure and how various events take place. There is a point when the tragic hero is force to commit a mistake. So that is something which happens to the tragic hero. There is a mistake that he commits and this mistake, this flaw it happens without any kind of external force.

And this happens to be the central flaw in the character. So this flaw is not, if this central flaw is induced by something external by the others than the character's is to be perfect. The intention is to show the fall, the decline of a tragic hero who is good, who possesses all kinds of propriety, who is consistent and who is also very very realistic.

So for such a character to encounter a fall, the flaw needs to come from within and that's what, Hamartia talks about and the most important thing is that there is no external force over here to force the character to do something or not to do something. And then we move onto a tragic irony. And it is here that we begin to realize that at a certain point of time once this hero commits the mistake, the story, the plot also reaches a point where we find all the problems following on the hero one after the other.

There would be one in instant which triggers this and one instant which also places itself as the central tragic irony. If you're familiar with the play Othello you can also see that the handkerchief scene, a scene where he begins to know that Othello begins to know that Desdemona had been cheating and of course these are all planted, if you're familiar with the

play Othello the classic handkerchief scene is the place where we find the centric tragedy irony at work.

And from this there are series of inevitable and unstoppable events that follow and at this point is important to notice that the audience unfamiliar with what's happening. The audience know from the beginning that there is a tragedy which is about to befall the tragic hero. The audience from the beginning that the hero is actually (16:22) lot of things which would eventually lead to his fall, his decline and sometimes even his death but this knowledge is hidden from the hero and as well as the others who are part of the play.

So there is a certain kind of a dialogue we find going on between the stage and the audience where the audience also feel other privilege that they know things which the characters themselves are not familiar with, so throughout this process where you need to keep in mind this ongoing dialogue between the stage and the audience where the audience is the part of this meaning making process.

The audience is part of the emotional drama which unfolds both onstage as well as in the minds of the audience and then we come to the catastrophe where there is a reversal of fortune. Here we also find the significance of placing a tragic hero who is good, who possesses all kinds of proprietary, who is held in an esteem honor because the catastrophe are the reversal of fortune will have more effect.

It will begin to make more sense only if there is a fall, there is a significant fall from high to low status, only if there is a significant loss of honor and loss of reputation and loss of recognition we find is happening in Othello if you are familiar with the tragedy Othello, Shakespeare's Othello you will know the kind of esteem with which Othello is regarded at in the beginning and the will see how jealousy overtakes him and how he pays more attention to Iago is word and how he brings it upon himself.

How he brings this fall upon himself and this is what makes the tragic hero and this unfolding, this unfolding of the tragic process more dramatic because there is nothing that anyone else could do to stop it. It's entirely the tragic heroes doing because he is capable of taking control, he is capable of taking charge and with that responsibility also comes the risk of great fall and great decline wherein lies the heart of the tragedy itself.

And the in the final stage we find this stage of recognition and discovery there is an element of surprise not for the audience but for the hero, for the tragic hero. And by the study also

realize the hero begins to figure out where things went wrong he understands his mistake, he understands his central flaw but by then it is too late to do anything because whatever had happened is also irreversible.

So we find that in this process there is a certain structure though if this is not a very rigid kind of a structure they knew that there are ways in which we can look at any fiction, any tragedy, any tragic story where you can find this pattern happening. And even in today's terms, if we look at any work of art, any work of fiction, any work of drama you would realize that unless the tragic hero is of a certain kind of a stature there is no way in which tragedy can work there.

There is no room for tragedy unless the fall is big enough for the audience to sympathize and empathize with. So alongside Aristotle is also talking about effect that this entire process onstage has on the audience. So it is a something like a psychological effect, therapeutic quality and when we talk about the effect on the audience there is a central term that is used catharsis and this can be located at the heart of all discussions related to tragedy and poetics.

So while talking about the effect on the audience and while talking about this therapeutic conditions, this therapeutic condition, this therapeutic process that happens which is catharsis, it is a combination of 2 emotions, the twin emotions of pity and fear. And pity because the audience like the tragic hero. They feel for the tragic hero because the tragic hero is also someone who is good who is held in high esteem.

And fear because they are afraid that something similar could happen to them too. So there are these twin emotions that work pity and fear. And this emotion whatever happens there it is so overwhelming that the audience feels that they can feel it any more, it becomes beyond them, it transports them out of themselves, it also leaves them with the feeling that they have spent all their emotions.

It's like a purging of their emotions where they feel completely spent and the irony is that they also feel very good about it that is the test of true tragedy, you feel spent, you go through a partition of emotions, there is pity and fear, you fear that you know this could happen to you and you pity the hero who is onstage. At the same time that this is all fiction nothing about this is real but in spite of that one undergoes this process of catharsis and the audience emerge feeling better.

And we find this happening even today with works of fiction, with movies that we watch that this feeling of partition, this feeling of catharsis that one goes through can be taken as one true test of whether the work, the what one sees on the stage or on the screen have the desired effect on the reader or on the audience. So here Aristotle is also talking about a certain kind of an effect on happy audience where he also accounts these things like a scientific phenomenon.

And his analysis also, it is also is very very technical in nature. In the following session what we shall do is, we will come back to take a look at the text and it is original and we will also look through this radius aspects and how he tried to define different plots and how he tried to give a structure to something which is very very abstract and this structure we will also see as a dean extremely helpful in understanding Western critical thought.

In formulating the various critical thesis and critical understanding of literature across centuries, across languages and this is a way in which we also particularly see to it Aristotle and his poetics within this larger framework of world literature that it provided certain foundation, certain handy tools to engage with literature and by extension the audience responses in a very systematic framework.

I thank you for listening to this and before the next session I hope you will be able to click a look at some of the significant excerpts from the text poetics shall also be circulated to you and we shall come back to have a more detailed discussion about plot and the other important concepts that Aristotle talks about in poetics. I thank you for listening again and I look forward to see you in the next session.