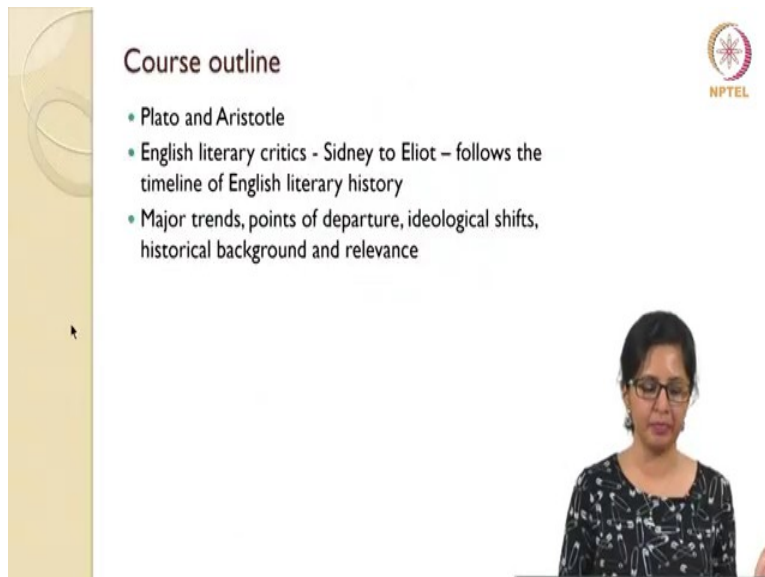


**Literary Criticism
Introduction
IIT Madras Production
Department of Higher Education
Ministry of Human Resource Development
Government of India**

Hello and welcome to this course on literary criticism. In this introductory lecture we shall be trying to situate this course and also look at the relevance of doing literary criticism as a course in the contemporary. I shall be taking you through the course outline to give you the sense of the texts that we shall be covering as part of this course and also the modes through which the discussions shall be carried forward. So, this is the bare course outline.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:35)



The slide features a vertical yellow bar on the left with a circular graphic. To its right, the text 'Course outline' is displayed. Below this, a bulleted list contains three items: 'Plato and Aristotle', 'English literary critics - Sidney to Eliot – follows the timeline of English literary history', and 'Major trends, points of departure, ideological shifts, historical background and relevance'. The NPTEL logo is positioned in the upper right corner of the slide area. A small inset video of a woman with glasses is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Course outline

- Plato and Aristotle
- English literary critics - Sidney to Eliot – follows the timeline of English literary history
- Major trends, points of departure, ideological shifts, historical background and relevance

NPTEL

We shall begin with Plato and Aristotle to give a sense of how the western critical foundations were laid and then we shall be looking at the English literary critics because this course is primarily on English literary criticism and how those traditions helped formulate the understanding of literature and the understanding of criticism across different traditions and different cultures and we shall be looking at English literary critics from Philip Sidney to Eliot and this also follows the timeline of English literary history.

So, it will be a good idea for you to be familiar with the history of English language and literature to give you a sense of the trends and the major milestones- literary, cultural, political milestones that happened in the history of English language and literature. It will also tell you how to position these various, changing literary critical trends. We shall be looking at major trends. We shall be analysing the points of departure at every point of time. If you are aware of the history of English language and literature, you know that there are these different timelines. There are these different stages through which history and literature progress. So, there are these points of departure which become very, very significant in defining the contours of each period, of each timeline.

So, we shall be looking at how literary and critical trends were formulated accordingly. We will be looking at ideological shifts which also had a bearing on the literature that was produced and, more importantly, on evolving the yardsticks to understand, to evaluate and to critique literature. The historical background and relevance of each period, of each critic, is something that we shall be looking at throughout this course and this becomes all the more important- to understand how the shifts were made from one period to the other, from one critical trend to the other.

It will also in addition, I believe, help us to situate the relevance of literature and the relevance of criticism in the contemporary, as you might be knowing, we have moved long way from these foundations laid from the times of Plato and Aristotle. There are a lot of contemporary movements, literary critical movements, that have overtaken most of the earliest trends and earliest approaches and these shifts from an undated past to the present, it is important to make sense of it in order to appreciate the kind of writings, in order to appreciate the different approaches through which we try and understand literature and culture.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:57)



Key figures

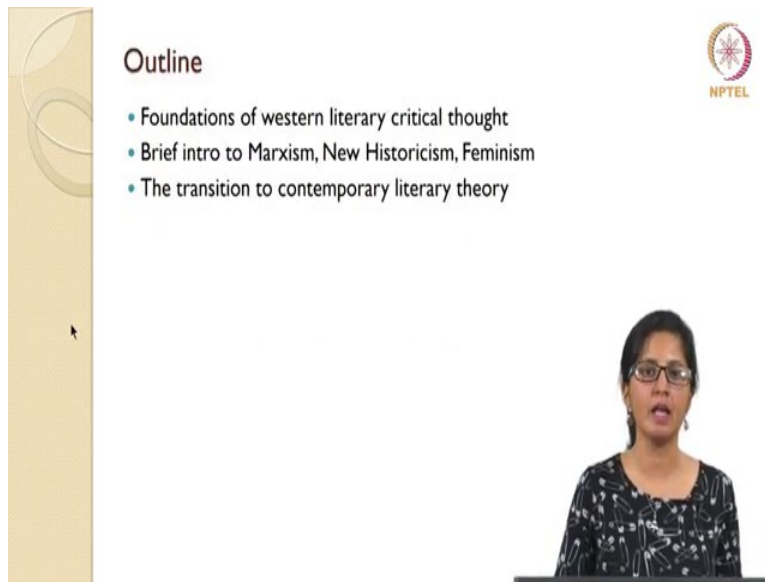
- Starting point – Aristotle's *Poetics*
- Philip Sydney's "Apology for Poetry"
- Samuel Johnson's "Preface to Shakespeare"
- William Wordsworth's Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*
- ST Coleridge's selection/excerpts
- Matthew Arnold's selection/excerpts
- Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent"
- F R Leavis



These are the key figures in our discussion throughout this course. We begin with Aristotle's *Poetics* after having given a background on how the Greco-Roman thoughts also laid the foundation to the formulations of western literary and critical thought and then we shall be looking at Philip Sydney's *Apology for Poetry*, Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare*, William Wordsworth's *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* and some excerpts and selections from Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Matthew Arnold's selections and a few excerpts.

We shall be then in the modern times in the earlier twentieth century looking at Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* and we will wrap up with a discussion on F R Leavis. This does not necessarily mean that we are limiting our discussion to these key figures but this provides a framework for situating this course and this is the outline:

(Refer Slide Time: 03:44)



Outline

- Foundations of western literary critical thought
- Brief intro to Marxism, New Historicism, Feminism
- The transition to contemporary literary theory

We begin by looking at the foundations of western literary critical thought which has its origin, which locates its beginning, from the Greco-Roman civilization onwards. So, we look at some of the important figures, some of the important texts which also become seminal in our understanding of various concepts at different points of time and as a corollary, in order to situate the contemporariness of literary criticism and how the past also connects with the present, we shall also be giving a brief introduction to some of the recent trends that have shaped the contemporary, shaped the twentieth century, such as Marxism, New Historicism, Feminism and also to new critical movements. So, this will also help you to understand the transition into contemporary literary theory when you are doing advanced level courses on literary theory. This will also help you to bridge the gaps and formulate the connections and also see that this is not something which is disconnected from each other but there is a continuum. There is an almost seamless kind of continuum that you can find from one trend to the other, one approach to the other, from one period to the other.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:48)



Course structure: Four Modules

- The Classical Age
 - Graeco Roman influences: Plato, Aristotle, Longinus
- Renaissance to Victorian Age
 - Renaissance and Neoclassical – Sydney, Dryden, Johnson
 - Romantic – Wordsworth, Coleridge
 - Victorian – Arnold, Pater
- 20th century criticism
 - New Criticism – T S Eliot, F R Leavis
- Modern Literary theory
 - General background and Introduction

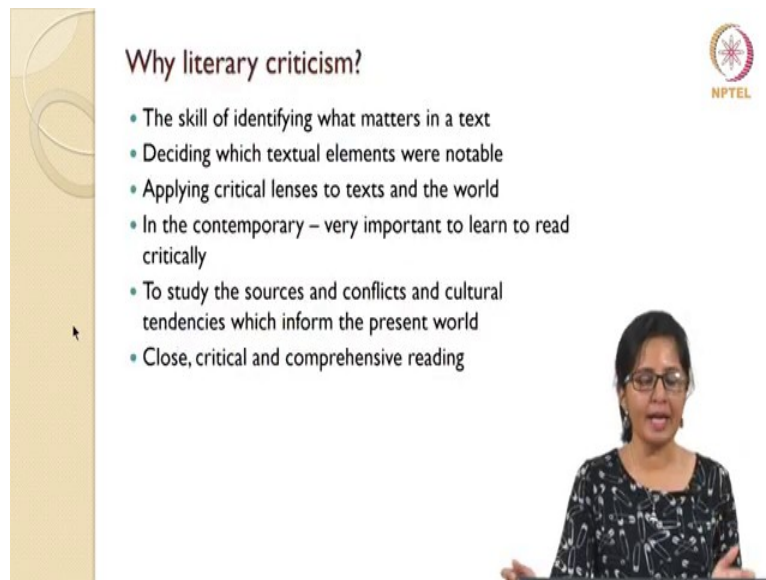


And for convenience and largely for the sake of making sense of this course which otherwise could be very vast and dissipated, we have divided this into four different modules beginning with the Classical age where we look at the Greco-Roman influence and we look primarily at Plato, Aristotle and Longinus. We shall be looking at the original texts and also shall be reading them and analysing them together. And while reading these classical texts, these texts from the Greco- Roman period, we shall also be trying to see the connections with the contemporary; how in the twentieth century, these texts have been looked back at and how they have formulated the various ways in which the understanding, our contemporary understanding of art, literature, culture and many things that are important to us.

And then in the second module, we look at a period from the Renaissance to the Victorian age. Here we shall be looking at Sydney, Dryden and Johnson who are the representatives of the Renaissance and the Neo-classical period and before that there is a period, the Middle Ages, which have also been referred to as the Dark ages. We shall be looking at some of the transitionary influences of those times as well. In the Romantic period we have William Wordsworth and Coleridge who laid the foundations of the nineteenth century critical thought. They also marked a significant departure which eventually led to modernism and then there are multiple ways in which we find that these yardsticks, they continue to be relevant even in the contemporary. From the Victorian period we have Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater.


As far as twentieth century literary criticism is concerned which also forms the third module of this course, we focus on New Criticism and we look at selected texts by TS Eliot as well as F R Leavis. In the fourth module, which shall be relatively smaller in terms of content, we look at modern literary theory. We give a general background and introduction and also connect the first 3 segments with the fourth one. This will give you a historical sense as well as an ideological sense of how these different ages are connected together in spite of them being very different in terms of historical location, in terms of their time period. So, why do we have to do literary criticism?


(Refer Slide Time: 07:01)



Why literary criticism?

- The skill of identifying what matters in a text
- Deciding which textual elements were notable
- Applying critical lenses to texts and the world
- In the contemporary – very important to learn to read critically
- To study the sources and conflicts and cultural tendencies which inform the present world
- Close, critical and comprehensive reading





Literary criticism is the skill of identifying what matters in a text. This is one loose definition that one could think of. This also decides which textual elements are notable. If you look at any kind of text, irrespective of the genre, we also realize that there are things which need more acute engagement. There are things which can be overlooked. So, criticism gives us a kind of filter, a tool, to select what is more important, what is more notable within a text. And this also trains us to apply a critical lens to the text as well as the world. This is the connection that I want you to keep in mind throughout this course.

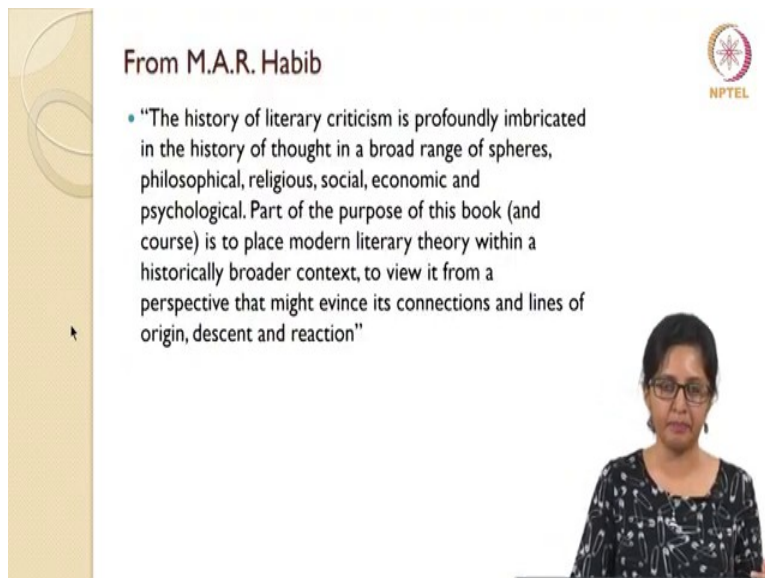
While we are looking at a text it is not just about the text it is also about the world which constitutes the text, also about the world for which the text is produced, the world which consumes this text. And in the contemporary it has become all the more important to learn to

read critically, not just the plethora of text that has been produced but also the ability to read the contemporary world, the text produced in the contemporary world, the text written and also from other media. It becomes all the more important and we also in this process learn to study the sources, conflicts and cultural tendencies which inform the present world.

These are some of the aspects that we shall come back to, time and again, during this course and we shall be looking at these things in greater detail. Ultimately, we do literary criticism because this is a major tool that we use for textual analysis, for discourse analysis and it enables us to do a close, critical and comprehensive reading. These may come across as very, very simple terms but they are very loaded as well and in our reading we also understand that literary criticism is one tool, one frame, which enables us to read differently from others.

It gives us a specialized skill to do close reading, to do a critical reading and to do a comprehensive reading. This also helps us to move ahead to a new different realm of reading where we do not merely read for pleasure, we do not merely look at reading as a leisure activity but also read with rigour and by placing it within a disciplinary understanding, within the disciplinary contours which also demands a special kind of a training and a special kind of an understanding. This is what literary criticism does in terms of its disciplinary foundations.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:20)

The slide features a gold background with a decorative circular pattern on the left side. In the top right corner, there is a circular logo with a star-like design and the text 'NPTEL' below it. The main content of the slide is a quote from M.A.R. Habib. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a woman with glasses and a dark patterned top.


From M.A.R. Habib

- "The history of literary criticism is profoundly imbricated in the history of thought in a broad range of spheres, philosophical, religious, social, economic and psychological. Part of the purpose of this book (and course) is to place modern literary theory within a historically broader context, to view it from a perspective that might evince its connections and lines of origin, descent and reaction"

I read to you this quote from M.A.R Habib: “The history of literary criticism is profoundly imbricated in the history of thought in a broad range of spheres, philosophical, religious, social, economic and psychological. Part of the purpose of this book (and course) is to place modern literary theory within a historically broader context, to view it from a perspective that might evince its connections and lines of origin, descent and reaction.”

I repeat the second part: Part of the purpose of this course is to place modern literary theory within a historically broader context, to view it from a perspective that might evince its connections and lines of origin, descent and reaction. So, the most important word here, I understand, is context followed by connections. So, this course I hope will give you a sense of context and connections in the terms of literary theory and the critical approaches.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:18)



The slide features a vertical decorative bar on the left with a circular pattern. The main content is a list of bullet points under the heading 'Literacy to critical literacy'. The NPTEL logo is in the top right corner. A woman is visible in the bottom right corner of the slide frame, appearing to be presenting.

Literacy to critical literacy

- To become aware of the cultural locatedness of practices
- To question the taken-for-grantedness of systematic knowledge, understanding that what appears to be the 'natural' view of phenomena is actually a view produced by particular combinations of historical, social, political influences
- (Len Unsworth)

NPTEL

And I also find it important to engage with one of the statements made by Len Unsworth and he talks about the importance of having to move towards critical literacy from literacy. Mere literacy enables you to read, enables you to understand in the way that it gives us a superficial sense of a meaning but critical literacy is the tool that becomes handy for us in order to approach this from within a disciplinary perspective.

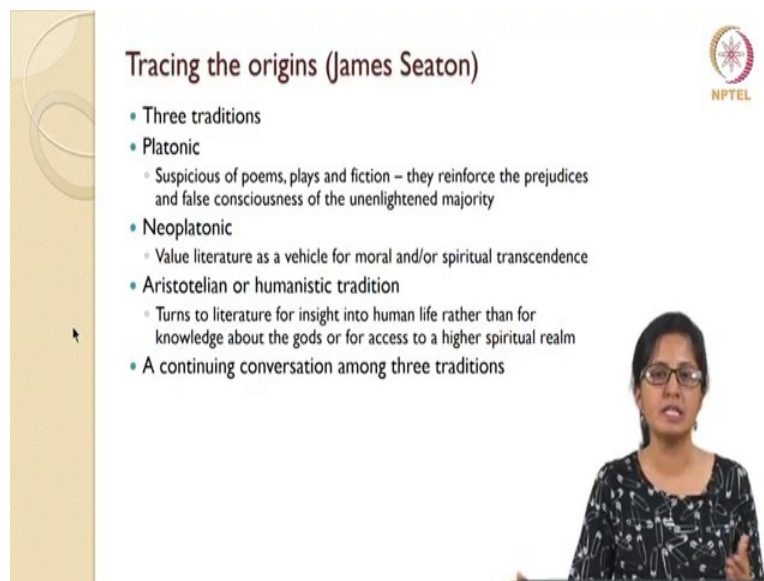
So, critical literacy is to become aware of the cultural locatedness of practices and this comes only from the understanding that every text is located. It is the locatedness that literary criticism and tools of literary criticism enable us to access, enable us to dissect and understand. It also

helps us to question the taken-for-grantedness of systematic knowledge, understanding that what appears to be the natural view of phenomena is actually a view produced by particular combinations of historical, social and political influences.

So, I draw your to these three words here, about the historically broader context, the connections across and within and also the combinations. So, by getting a sense of the context, the connections and the combinations we also learn to read texts which are located within particular cultures, within particular historical periods and also, in a larger sense, within communities, within individuals, within different kinds of practices. So, this is what literary criticism trains us to do.

And I hope by the end of this course we shall also be more attuned, more than just understanding the historical context of how literary criticism evolved and how the different trajectories have been traced. I hope you also will be able to approach texts from these different contexts, understanding the combinations which also produce text and also understanding the contexts which not just produce texts but also produce particular readings about texts.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:24)



Tracing the origins (James Seaton)

- Three traditions
- Platonic
 - Suspicious of poems, plays and fiction – they reinforce the prejudices and false consciousness of the unenlightened majority
- Neoplatonic
 - Value literature as a vehicle for moral and/or spiritual transcendence
- Aristotelian or humanistic tradition
 - Turns to literature for insight into human life rather than for knowledge about the gods or for access to a higher spiritual realm
- A continuing conversation among three traditions

NPTTEL

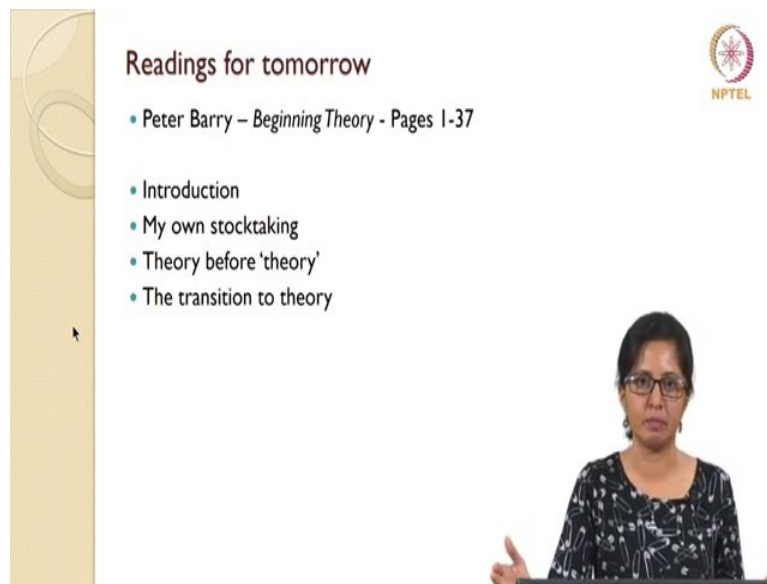
James Seaton in one of his recent books which tries to trace the history of literary criticism from Plato to Postmodernism identifies three different tradition which he also thinks are the hallmarks of contemporary literary theory. He begins by talking about the platonic tradition where, in the earlier period, where we would also know when we look at in greater detail Plato's writings.

There was a suspicion of literature, suspicion of poems, plays and fiction because in the Platonic view, the argument was that they reinforced the prejudices and false consciousness of the unenlightened majority.

And from then there was a move towards a Neoplatonic approach where literature was valued as a vehicle for moral and spiritual transcendence. This was seen as something that would edify the individual, the society and the nation and in the Aristotelian or humanistic tradition which also became the foundation for most kinds of literature and literary readings in the later periods, there we find that there is a move, a turn towards literature to gather insight into human life and here the departure is very, very evident. It is not just about literature or any kind of art form that moves away all sorts of theistic perceptions.

Thereby, also pointing out that it is not just about the knowledge about gods or access to a higher spiritual realm but it is solely about insights into human life, human communities and the ways in which humans systems function. So, James Seaton argues that, in the contemporary, literary criticism needs to be understood as a continuing conversation among three traditions. One is free to agree or disagree with this and there are different departures, different perspectives from which we can approach James Seaton's positioning of these three different traditions and the identification of the continuing conversation among these three traditions.


(Refer Slide Time: 14:25)



Readings for tomorrow

- Peter Barry – *Beginning Theory* - Pages 1-37
- Introduction
- My own stocktaking
- Theory before 'theory'
- The transition to theory

NPTEL



These are the some of the things that we shall be doing as a part of this course. So, tomorrow when we meet again I hope you will be able to read the introduction from Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory*, the first 37 pages. You can focus on the 4 sections: Introduction, My own stocktaking, Theory before 'theory' and the Transition to theory. This will help us enter the discussions on literary criticism and from the following section onwards we shall also be following a more chronological trajectory in order to get into the readings.

So, tomorrow we shall be discussing Peter Barry's Introduction from *Beginning Theory*. This will help us to situate this course as well as the text that we are trying to cover as a part of this course within a historical timeline and also see who belongs where. I hope you will get a better sense of it when we go through this introduction tomorrow. I thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you tomorrow where we also discuss Peter Barry's *Beginning Theory*. Thank you!