Narrative Mode and Fiction
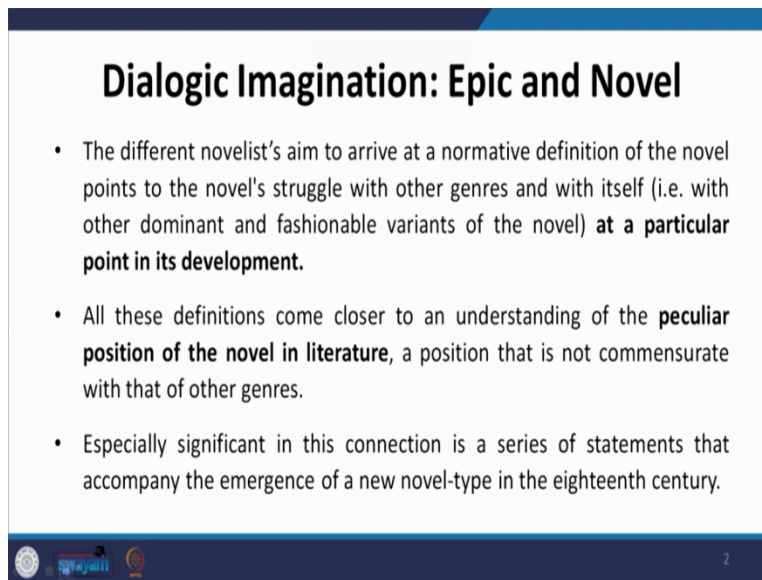**Prof. Sarbani Banerjee**
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Lecture - 09
Fiction and Different Modes of Narrative -IV

Good morning and welcome back to the lecture series on narrative mode and fiction, so we are discussing fiction and different modes of narrative. Today is going to be the last lecture from this module. So, in a dialogic imagination we find Mikhail Bakhtin comparing the two genres epic and novel.

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The different novelist's aim, so we ended our last lecture with the question of how different novelists have tried to give some definitive or normative meaning, normative intention to the form of novel try to attach some definition fixed definition to the genre of novel. But novel being the way it is tends to escape you know outgrow all such a pre-given definitions. And now the different novelists aim to arrive at a normative definition of the novel points to the novel's struggle.

The novel as a genre is constantly struggling with other genres as well as with itself. Constantly evolving through parodying, itself, through revisiting it is, through commenting on its earlier avatars if we may and so novel, we see is constantly you know developing, changing, mutating

through dialogizing with other dominant and fashionable variants of the novel. So, it is never cut off from history that is one thing we have to understand in the case of novel too.

I mean the treatment of history in the case of the epic and the in the case of the novel are quite different we will come to that. So, history becomes the basis of both the genres the novel while parodying the past the past genres the past avatars of novel the antiquated versions is still speaking, revisiting, dialogizing with these versions. It is not cut off from them. So, this development is happening through connecting dots.

We cannot look at the metamorphosis unless the dots are adequately collected. So, at any particular point in its development we even know that it has developed through connecting the dots like I said through locating it in history. So, novel is never cut off from history never cut off from its form or avatars the former older you know forms of novel or even the old is genres such as epic and tragedy.

All the different definitions come closer to an understanding of the peculiar position that novel posits in literature itself a position that is not a commensurate with that of other genres. Novel cannot stabilize it cannot fossilize it has to keep growing, keep mutating, especially significant in this connection is a series of statements that one finds which accompany the emergence of a new novel type in the 18th century.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- The series opens with Henry Fielding's reflections on the novel and its hero in *Tom Jones*.

- It continues in Wieland's foreword to *Agathon*, and the most essential link in the series is Blankenburg's *Versuch uber den Roman*.

- By the end of this series, the **theory of the novel is formulated by the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.**

So, this series opens with Henry fielding's reflections on the novel and the novels hero in Tom Jones. Then it continues in violence forward to Agathon and the most essential link in this series in this contrivance or in this endeavour at defining the novel is found in Brandenburg's Versuch uber den Roman. By the end of the series the theory of the novel is formulated we find this formulation coming from none other than the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

So, we find this formulation coming from the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- In all these statements, each reflecting the novel in one of its critical stages (*Tom Jones, Agathon, Wilhelm Meister*), the following prerequisites for the novel are considered as basic characteristics:

  a) the novel should not be **"poetic,"** as the word "poetic" is used other genres of **imaginative literature**;

  b) the hero of a novel should not be **"heroic" in either the epic or the tragic sense** of the word: he should combine in himself negative as well as positive features, low as well as lofty, ridiculous as well as serious;

  c) the hero should not be portrayed **as an already completed and unchanging person** but as **one who is evolving and developing, a person who learns from life**;

In all these different you know endeavours to define the novel in all these statements each reflecting the novel in one of its critical stages here we are thinking of Tom Jones, Agathon, Wilhelm Meister. One could gather some prerequisites that are observed more or less by all the authors by all the commentators the prerequisites for the novel which form its which constitute its basic characteristics.

So, A if we could conclude from these different statements, we would say that A the novel should not be poetic as the word poetic is used in other genres of imaginative literature. Next the hero of a novel should not be heroic in either the epic or the tragic sense of the word. So, the hero of the novel is not the same as the epic hero or the tragic hero. He should combine in himself he should have in himself both the negative as well as positive possibilities features aspects.

A combination of low and lofty ridiculous and serious. Next the hero should not be portrayed as an already completed and unchanging person. Rather the novels hero is one who is evolving and developing a person that learns from life the flawed conditions of life, he himself is flawed, he himself has his limitations and he is constantly picking up from the limited conditions of human society, modern existence.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

d) the novel should become for the **contemporary world** what the epic was for the ancient world (an idea that Blankenburg expressed very precisely, and that was later repeated by Hegel).

- All these prerequisites, when taken together, constitute a criticism of other genres from the novel's point of view and of the relationship these genres **bear to reality**. For instance, the modern novel critiques the older genre's stilted heroizing, their narrow and unlifelike poeticalness, their monotony and abstractness, as well as the pre-packaged and unchanging nature of their heroes.

Next another salient feature if we may call it as, so the novel should become for the contemporary world what the epic was for the ancient world. And this is an idea that Blankenburg expressed a very precisely and it was later also adopted and repeated by Hegel. So, and why not novel is about the diminished conditions of humanity the limitations the flawed conditions of humanity to an extent the corrupt world the un narrative aspects of the modern world, the non-narrative aspects of the modern world.
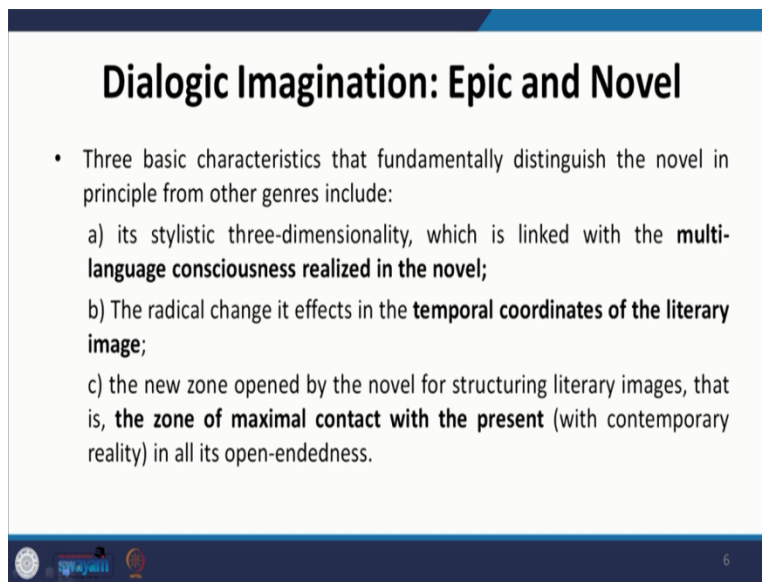
And we see this being incorporated in the modern novel, a narration that leads to nowhere through minimalism or even through maximalism. So, definitely it is a reflection of its contemporary societies emerging it is churning out of the contemporary and not from elsewhere. In the same way epic is a emerging from a sense of history, it is not outside of the sense of history.

But as we will see and as I will explain now the treatment of history in the case of novel and in the case of epic are quite different. So, we see that all these prerequisites characteristics that comprise the novel when taken together make up a criticism of other genres from the novelistic from the novelist's point of view. And so, the criticism extends to the relationship these genres bear to reality.

How do different genres project, present, represent reality? For instance, the modern novel critics the older genres, stilted you know notion of heroism hero icing they are narrow and on life like poeticalness politicalness their monotony and abstractness as well is the pre-packaged and unchanging ontologically fixed nature of their heroes here we have the epic hero and the tragic hero in our mind.

Three basic characteristics that fundamentally distinguish the novel in principle from other genres could include the following.

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A, it is a stylistic three-dimensionality which is linked with the multi-language consciousness that is always intrinsic to any novel b, the radical change it affects in the temporal coordinates of the literary image and c, the new zone that is opened by the novel for structuring literary images, in other words the zone of maximal contact with the contemporary reality with the present and which renders the novel all its open-endedness.

So, moving you know back to epic and the question of treating history something that I was mentioning a while back.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- In the case of the epic, **memorialization takes place with the artistic language only** that which is worthy of being remembered, that which should be preserved in the **memory of descendents;** an image is created for descendents, and this image is projected on to their sublime and distant horizon.
- Contemporaneity for its own sake, in its ordinary sense (that is to say, a contemporaneity that makes no claim on future memory) is molded in clay; **contemporaneity for the future (for descendents)** is molded in the marble or bronze through an idyllic and ideal rendition of the past.

In the case of the epic, we see memorialization is happening or taking place with the artistic language only and through remembering that and only that which is worthy of being remembered. So, some kind of seething some kind of you know straining, streamlining of memory is going on that part of memory which should be preserved and a bequest passed down to the descendants.

An image that is created that is very consciously formed for the descendants to inherit and this image is projected on to their sublime and a distant horizon. So, it is happening on a plane that is distant and that is almost transcendental sublime and a reader sitting in the modern times, in the modern conditions cannot so much as even touch it. We can only feel odd at the epic the mastery that it involves, the greatness, the loftiness of epic.
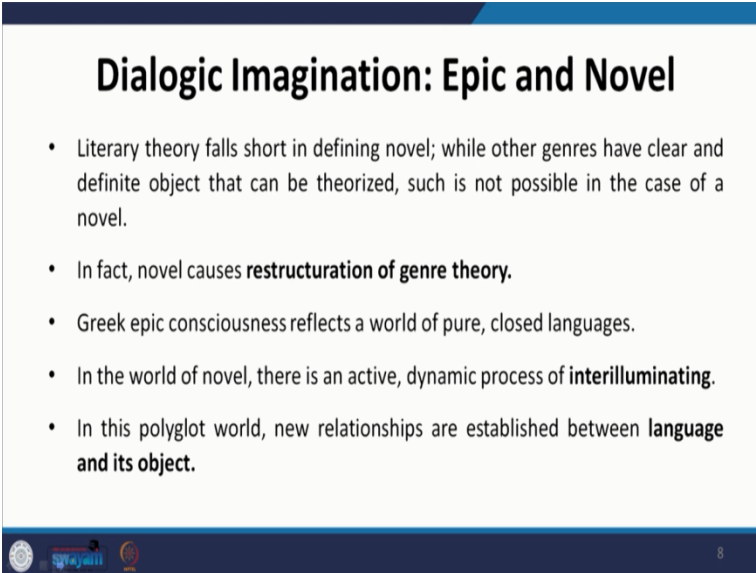
We cannot become very close to the epic, our conditions virus from identifying with epic. So, contemporaneity for its own sake that is ordinary sense in its **(()) (12:48)** that is to see a contemporary that makes no claim on a certain version of future memory. That is not consciously shaping memory in any way in a way we could see such a ordinary contemporaneity, ordinary understanding of past is moulded in clay.

Epic is not about a past that is moulded in clay, contemporaneity for the future for descendants is you know moulded in the marble or in gold in bronze only once the past is made to see through

the lens of the ideal. An ideal and idyllic rendition of the past that is epic. So, it is shaping of a national you know memory which becomes a heritage which becomes timeless, spaceless. So, epic is a canon of all canons who can really criticize an epic it is too big to be criticized, it is too large to be criticized.

This is simply because the past like I said is moulded a lot in clay not in terms of ordinariness but in marble, in gold, in bronze, one can only feel odd and not really criticize it.

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Now coming to novel which has and which is aware of its own limitations. Literary theory falls short in defining novel, well other genres have clear and definite object that can be theorized such as in the case of epic and tragedy, the same is not possible in the case of the novel. In fact, the novel you know causes restructuration of genre theory if we have some generic formulations meant for the novel such a theory needs to be revisited reformulated and restructured too often.
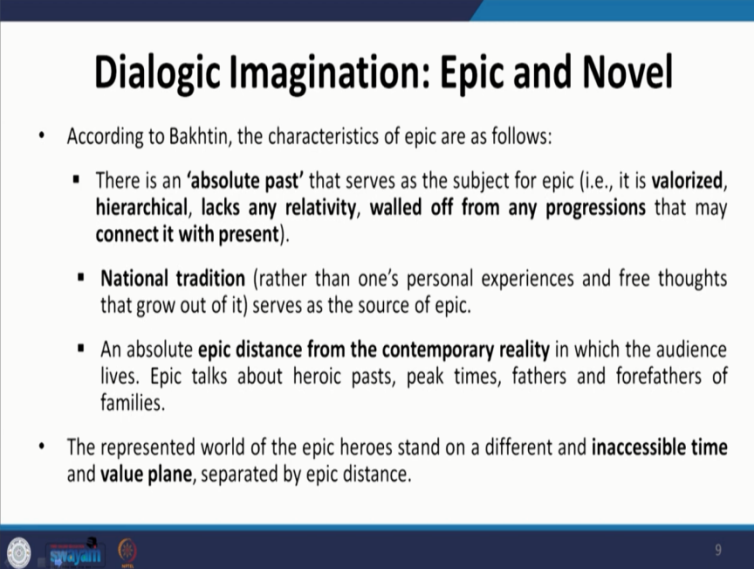
So, epic Greek epic consciousness reflects a world of pure closed languages. In the world of the novel on the other hand there is an active dynamic process of inter illumination. So, we will see that as the novel travels in time as it develops the voice of the author one you know only signed omnipotent author is submerged by different perspectives, different characters perspectives, the author's perspective could be that of or one of the characters.

So, the authors only science is being taken away. This is happening with phenomenology obviously we see this not only in novel but also in short story. So, in this polyglot world through inter illumination not only about what a character is but what one thinks about a character. So, one character could be seen in various ways from various angles depending on different people's experiences, different people's perception where they come from.

This renders complexity layeredness to novel inter illumination one character throwing light to one aspect of another character and so on. So, meanings of characters significance of characters are not ultimate and final. So, in this polyglot world new relationships are being established between language and its object the signifier signified linear you know relation is kind of disconnected disrupted, raptured we have the **(()) (17:23)** syndrome.

Something I am going to come to very soon in our subsequent lectures which celebrates the thinking man. The person who can you know create his own significations, who can arrive at his own significations in dissociation from conventions, in dissociations from meta language social norms.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- According to Bakhtin, the characteristics of epic are as follows:

  - There is an 'absolute past' that serves as the subject for epic (i.e., it is **valorized, hierarchical, lacks any relativity, walled off from any progressions** that may **connect it with present**).

  - **National tradition** (rather than one's personal experiences and free thoughts that grow out of it) serves as the source of epic.

  - An absolute **epic distance from the contemporary reality** in which the audience lives. Epic talks about heroic pasts, peak times, fathers and forefathers of families.

- The represented world of the epic heroes stand on a different and **inaccessible time** and **value plane**, separated by epic distance.

So, according to Bakhtin the characteristics of epic are as follows, there is an absolute past that serves as the subject for epic. So, epic is looking at a valorised hierarchical past which lacks any kind of relativity it is absolute, it is solid and walled off from any progressions that may connect
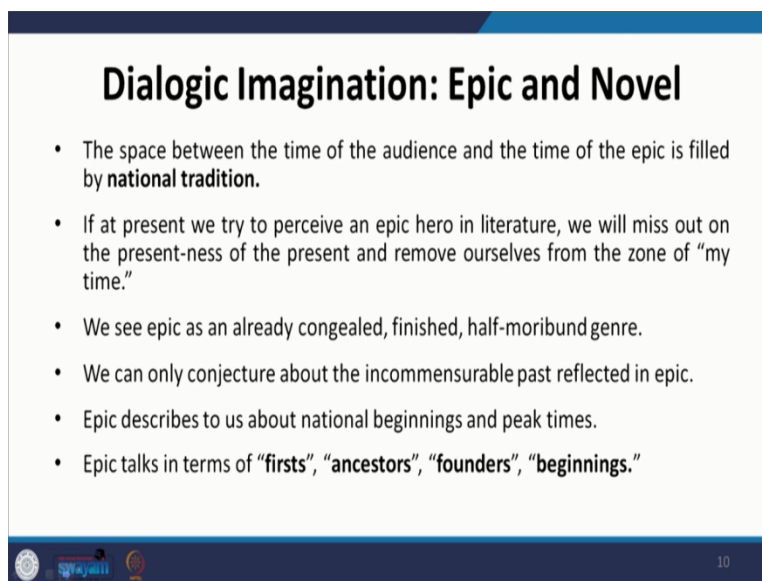
it with the presence. So, a kind of past that is so far away cannot even count the years lying between the present and the past.

Next, we see the national tradition being memorialized the memorialization process glorifies the national tradition. So, rather than the personal experiences or one's free thoughts that grow out of these experiences' ethics inspiration comes from national tradition, epic greatly draws on and serves a national tradition. So, an absolute epic distance from the contemporary reality in which the audience lives characterizes.

Epic talks about heroic pasts peak times golden era which can never be brought back in the present times. It is a narrative about and by the fathers and forefathers of you know well-known families of it is about kings and queens necessarily. So, the represented world of the epic heroes stand on a different edifice on a different platform altogether and with its inaccessible time and it is different set of values the plane of epic the plane.

That is set up by epic is altogether very elevated much different from our current existence it is. So, we are necessarily the readers in the modern times are separated from epic by epic distance. The space between the time of the audience and the time of the epic is filled by national tradition.

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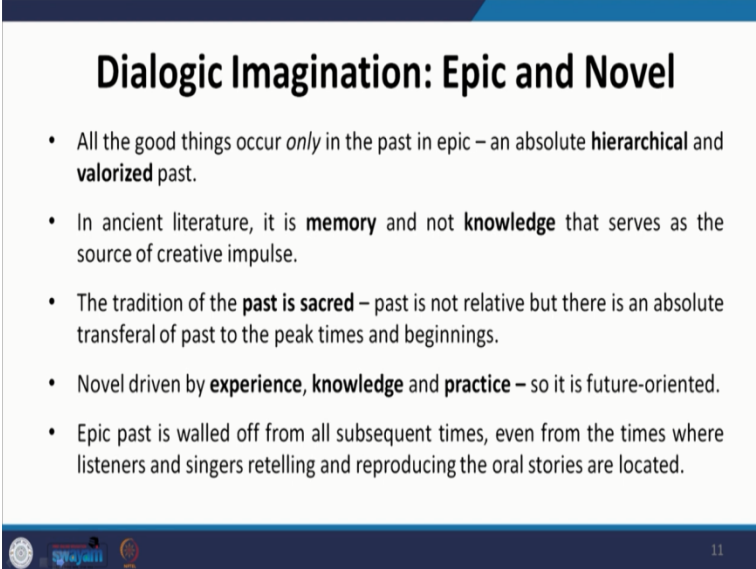## Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- The space between the time of the audience and the time of the epic is filled by **national tradition.**
- If at present we try to perceive an epic hero in literature, we will miss out on the present-ness of the present and remove ourselves from the zone of "my time."
- We see epic as an already congealed, finished, half-moribund genre.
- We can only conjecture about the incommensurable past reflected in epic.
- Epic describes to us about national beginnings and peak times.
- Epic talks in terms of "**firsts**", "**ancestors**", "**founders**", "**beginnings.**"

So, if at present we even try to perceive an epic hero in literature, we will miss out on the present ness of our present, we have to in a way take us or fathom the culture the society many thousands and thousands of years back where the standards of good evil, beauty, even the right thing to do and not to do are quite different. In order to identify with the epic, we have to remove ourselves from the zone of my time.

We see epic as an already congealed finished and half moribund in a way a half dead genre. We can only conjecture about the incommensurable past that is reflected in epic. Epic describes to us about national beginnings and about the golden times the golden past peak times epic talks in terms of firsts ancestors founders and beginnings.
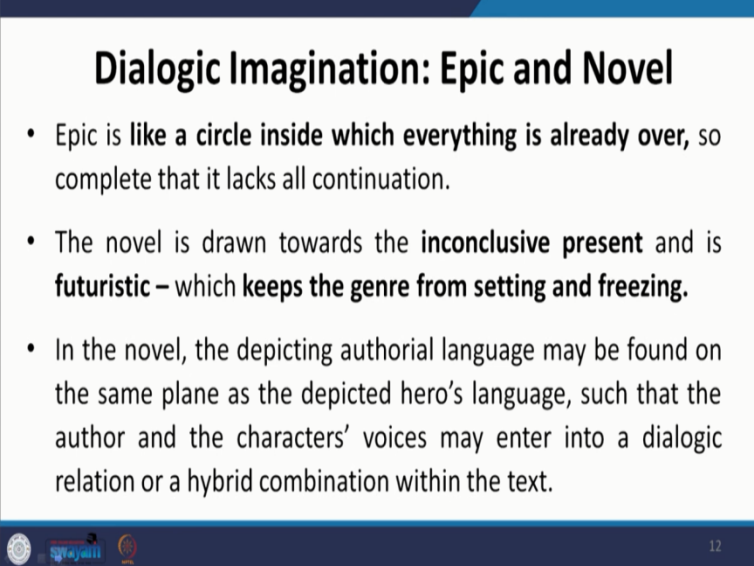
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So, all the good things in epic occur only in the past and absolute hierarchical and valorised past and in ancient literature it is memory and not knowledge that serves as the source of creative impulse. The tradition of the past is sacred so past is not relative but there is an absolute a transferal of past to the peak times and to the provenance, the origins, the beginnings. Novel is more driven by experience knowledge and practice which keeps growing and shuffling reshuffling.

So, it is necessarily a future oriented genre epic is past oriented. Epic past is walled off from all subsequent times even from the times where listeners and singers going to its oral tradition to

which it belongs, even the listeners and singers that subsequently retell and reproduce the stories the epic stories are distanced from it. So, epic time is even past to the ones that are retelling reproducing the oral tales, oral stories.

They are also located in separation from the historical provenance of the epic when it actually occurred when any incident when an episode actually occurred.
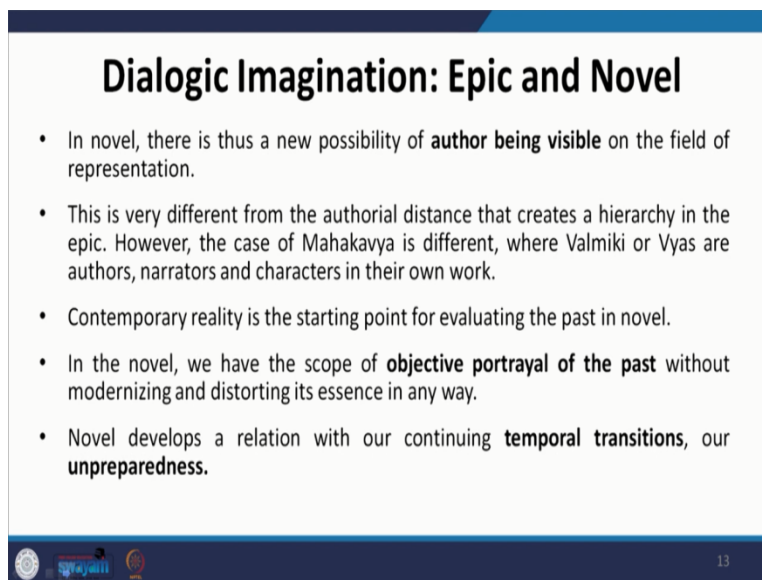
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So, epic is odd like in a way which is all pervasive in our life but which we cannot really sensorily you know approach we cannot touch or see it or hear it but it is it almost shapes us it defines us it greatly influences inspires our existence, epic is odd like. So, epic is also like a circle inside which everything is already over and done, just like the notion of destiny one finds when Krishna is sermonizing to Arjun.

With trepidation Arjun approaches Krishna saying that how can I kill my own kin who are now my enemies who are now my rival in Kurukshetra. And the whole the completed whole is actually inside the mouth of the Lord who is no longer a friend but becomes the Vishwarupan and he is showing the universe inside his limited small mouth where everyone is lying dead already always dead.

So, destiny is prefixed Arjun is just the medium. So, this is epic this is the quintessential you know understanding of epic a complete you know. So, complete that it in a way lacks all continuation all sense of continuation. The novel is drawn to us inconclusive present and it is futuristic and this keeps the genre from setting and freezing in any way. So, in the novel the depicting authorial language may be found on the same plane as that of the depicted hero's language.

The author and the characters all belonging to the same plane this happens with the progression of the novelistic tradition the author becoming the mouthpiece of one of the characters the all-powerfulness of the author is taken away. Such that the author and the character's voices may enter into a dialogue actually a dialogical relation and leading to you know a hybrid combination within the text.

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In the novel, there is thus a new possibility of author being visible on the field of representation. This is very different from the authorial distance that creates a hierarchy in the epic. Having said this I would like to specify that the case of Mahakavya the primary epics in India in Indic tradition is quite different where Valmiki or Vyas if we could consider them as one person. First of all, the copyright is not there are multiple authors in an epic both in Indian and Greek roman traditions multiple Valmiki's, multiple Vyas, multiple homers.

In the case of Mahakavya additionally see that the authors the I mean the authors are also the narrative voice and characters in their own work. So, the authors put themselves as one of the characters they keep appearing and re reappearing in different episodes Valmiki and Vyas keep coming back in different episodes. So, that renders it a richer texture actually. So, contemporary reality is the starting point for evaluating the past in the novel.

So, novels past is not very distant it is a past that one can touch one can see, it is not too far away because that past needs to be engaged with in order to understand the present ness of the novel, it is not a too far away past. It is something one can count calendrically so in terms of years, in terms of decades. So, in the novel we have the scope of objective portrayal of the past without really making a shrine out of a past if you know what I mean.

Without you know making a golden past out of a past, an ideally past, the past is just as ordinary and flawed as the present. So, we do not need to distort, we do not need to idealize the past in the epic sense in a novel. Novels develops a relation with our continuing temporal transitions and the human lives general condition of unpreparedness, its imminence the immediate condition being the immediate becoming that human life is novel is very much interested in that unpreparedness at every spontaneous moment of our lives.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- Epic is prophetic and its prophecy is realized within the tradition encompassed by epic.

- The novel is **problematic** in being **constantly re-thought** and **re-evaluated**.

- The **novel** has a **specific beginning, middle and end which** meets the requirement of form, whereas the epic is indifferent to formal beginnings and its end is arbitrary. Epic is life-size, almost encompassing a life journey, whereas novel focuses on that part of life which is relevant to its central problem.

- **Epic's every part is a whole, circular and complete** within a larger completed whole.

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So, epic is rather prophetic and its prophecy is realized within the tradition encompassed by epic. The novel is problematic in being constantly rethought and re-evaluated. The novel for the requirement of a definite form a material form the novel being part of a written tradition necessarily has a specific beginning, middle and end. And so, it meets the requirement the criteria of form novel is not part of oral tradition.

It is not meant to be recited and memorialized and retold to the subsequent generations. It is necessarily in the form of a document a book a finished work. So, no one can add anything related to it the question of copyright comes in. Other than the epic is indifferent to formal beginnings and its end is as arbitrary as its beginning. Epic is life-size almost encompassing a person's the protagonist's life, life journey.

Think of Ramayana life and journey of Ram from birth even from before his birth and in the end with his death. So, on the other hand novel focuses on only that part of the protagonist's life which is relevant to which speaks to its central problem. The problem around which the plot is pivoting; the problem to which the plot is hinged. So, epics every part is a hole it is a circle within circle structure I already talked about it.

So, each circle is a completed version or a completed form within a larger circle we could treat one story separately in its individual capacity outside of the epic. So, one episode can become one story just like a fable with some message in it.

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Dialogic Imagination: Epic and Novel

- In epic, the **structure of the whole** is **repeated in each part – each part is a miniature whole.**
- *Iliad* is a random excerpt from the Trojan cycle and its ending with the burial of Hector is also arbitrary from the novelistic point of view.
- The plot-line is pre-known, but several questions, such as what happens to Achilles is not really answered within the scope of *Iliad.*

So, in epic the structure of the whole is repeated in each part. So, each part is a miniature hole, each part is a smaller version of what the larger epic is and what it is it means to be. So, Iliad for example is a random excerpt from the Trojan cycle and it is ending with the burial of hector is also arbitrary from the novelistic point of view. So, in the plot line we do not have answers to several questions, the plot line is pre-known and certain questions remain unanswered.

For example, what happens to Achilles is not really answered within the scope of homer's Iliad. So, with this I am going to conclude today's lecture and we will meet again with another round of discussions in another lecture, thank you.