

Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture - 01
Indian Fiction in English – Introduction

Good morning everyone. I am happy to welcome you to the introductory session of this NPTEL course Indian Fiction in English. In today's session, I propose to give an outline of the course. I also introduce a major text that we shall be discussing and also the frame works within which this course has been structured and also about how the course in general has been designed and conceived and some of you might already be knowing this is a 12-week course.

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The course

- o 12 weeks
- o 30 hours
- o Postgraduate level
- o Lectures, presentations by students
- o Prescribed readings for each week
- o Prerequisite: familiarity with the texts discussed

That involves 30 hours of teaching. It is a pitch at the postgraduate level, the pedagogy, the teaching method includes lectures and also certain presentations by students in which they shall be sharing their learning, their insights and whatever they had complied through their whole reading and there would be prescribed a reading for each week and sometimes for each session and only prerequisite for this course is that you must be familiar with the text discussed in each session throughout this course.

This includes a familiarity with the novels prescribed for reading and also with the other critical material which could include a book length work as well as short essays or brief reviews of the

works that we are discussing. And at the outset we also will have a series of lectures which will give you a background and overview, a sense of the historical origins.

And the historical background of the emergence of this genre Indian Fiction in English and I also expect you to be familiar with the readings in that regards that you will be in sync with the things that we are discussing as a part of this course. Before I give an overview of the text that we shall be discussing as part of this course. I want you to pay attention to this term.

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Indian Fiction in English

- Language - written originally in English, not translations
 - Does not mean that translations are not part of this oeuvre
- Genre - fiction
 - For this course, mostly novels and a couple of short stories
- Indian - a problematic category!
 - No fixed definitions - going by the general understanding of the literary histories and critical tradition
 - Eg: Rushdie, Jhabvala, Raja Rao

Indian Fiction in English. In this descriptive term does have particular kinds of meanings and it does indicate certain kinds of text. First of all, let me draw your attention to the language, English. As part of this course, we shall be focusing on Indian Fiction written in English, by this I mean written originally in English and we are not looking at the translations for this course. However, this does not mean the translations are not part of this.

Overall Indian writing in English has expanded in multiple ways in the contemporary so as to include translations and many other variants, but for this course we shall be focusing only on the works originally introduced and published in English. At the same time, we shall be engaging with certain debates which include many issues of translation about the ideas of language and how language played a significant role during the awake of the colonial modernity.

And when we look at this genre which is Fiction we mostly include novels versus part of the course we also discussed just 2 short stories, but we of course shall be referring to some of the short stories when we are discussing the novels primarily and the reason for including novels mostly is that Indian fiction in English has been primarily characterized by the output in terms of the novels and the visibility of Indian fiction in English in the international literary market.

It has also been mostly due to the kind of long fiction, the kind of novels which have been produced from this side of the world. I am finally coming to this term India. It is a very a problematic category and it continues to be a problematic category even while we are dealing with this course Indian Fiction in English. There are no fixed definitions which I can give by way of Indians.

And mostly for this course we are going by the general understanding provided by the literary histories and the critical tradition. While we do not have a fixed kind of a definition for the term Indian we also include a range of writers who are Indian and not Indian for some reason or the other. For example, we have included Rushdie who does not currently hold an Indian passport and we also know many controversies associated with his identity.

We have Ruth Praver Jhabvala who was never an Indian as far as birth or ethnicity is concerned, but she has lived a considerable part of her youth in India because of her marriage to an Indian and there is Raja Rao who is Indian by birth, Indian by ethnicity but at the same time during the most productive years of his literary output, he was not living in Indian, he was mostly living in abroad and he continued to live and work in places outside India.

So there are multiple ways in which the identity of Indian has been framed and we try to include all of those variants and all of those ambiguity and ambivalence while we are dealing with the idea of Indian in this course Indian Fiction in English. I have tried to conceive and frame this course in a particular way. It is not just about a series of novels which have been put together in a particular way.

But it is also about a certain way in which a certain framework has been generated to situate the text that we are discussing and to aid me in this purpose I have used certain text which I refer to as a framing texts for this course.

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Framing texts ✓

- Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's *Illustrated History of Indian Literature in English*, 2003
- Meenakshi Mukherjee's *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, 1985
- Priyamvada Gopal's *The Indian English Novel: Nation, History and Narration*, 2009
- Srinivasa Iyengar's *Indian Writing in English*, 1965

They could also be considered as a secondary material. Some of the important secondary material as far as this course is concerned and much of which what is being dealt with in this course and many of the arguments and many of the postulations, many of the critical frameworks have been drawn extensively from these works which are being referred to over here and in addition which will be also referring to a certain other text which will be discussed with you in due course.

We will look at Arvind Krishna Mehrotra's illustrated history of Indian Literature in English which is published in 2003. This is by far the latest literary history as far as the history of Indian writing in English is concerned. It also has extensive sections talking about Indian fiction in English. Here I also want to remind you that though this course is titled Indian Fiction in English it is a history that it shares with the larger over Indian writing in English.

And in turn much of the current writings whether it is literary history or critical writings much of the current writings on Indian writing in English is also mostly and vastly about Indian fiction. So that is the way in which this genre has began to dominate not just a literary market, the atomic

frameworks, the publishing scenario, the target audience etc, so it is a least context that we shall be approaching this course in Indian Fiction in English.

And we shall be looking Meenakshi Mukherjee's *Realism and Reality the Novel and Society in India* published in 1985. This instantly is a text which could be considered as pioneering work as far as study of fiction, academic study of fiction in India is concerned. This work *realism and reality* by Meenakshi Mukherjee it gives insightful understanding of the origin of novel in India and also gives a wider understanding of how important it is to look at this genre of fiction.

When we talk about the literary and cultural background, the literary and cultural output of the contemporary. Priyamvada Gopal's *The Indian English Novel Nation History and Narration* published in 2009. It is a very useful work in helping us understand the connection between novel and nation especially in the context of Indian Fiction written in English and finally of course Srinivasa Iyengar's seminal work *Indian writing in English* published in 1965 that continues to be a foundation of text for the understanding for this course.

We time and again go back to Iyengar to get a historical sense of this genre to get an understanding of the initial ways in which the genre was talked about how it was critically framed how it was historically positioned. You would begin to realize that we also move away from Iyengar's postulations while Iyengars were continues to be a foundational work. It is also important to bring in your kinds of critics and important to move away from Iyengar.

So as to see the newer avenues so as to engage with the newer kinds of text which are being brought to us. So this is not to say that this entire course is based on these 4 texts, but these 4 texts in certain ways frame the overall idea of the course but of course as I have mentioned. We shall be looking at certain other works which shall be discussed with you in due course.

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Primary texts

- o Novels and short stories

And as far as the primary texts are concerned we are looking at novels and short stories. The details of which will be discussed with you shortly.

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Three major phases

- o Historical background, origins, early novels *19th century*
- o Colonial modernity
- o The novels of 1930s - 1950s
 - o Gandhian nationalist phase and Independence
- o The Post-1980s
 - o Rushdiesque, Postcolonial, Contemporary

There are 3 major phases that we are looking at: as far as this course is concerned and this would overall have remained structure, the main structure of this entire course as well. We begin by looking at the historical background, the origins, and also the early novels which were published and some of them are not fit enough to be called as novels so they are only referred to as protonovels or early narratives.

And what makes the discussion significant in this first phase is the impact of colonial modernity and in the first few sessions we shall be extensively looking at the idea of colonial modernity and how it impacted the emergence of this new genre in the nation which was yet to be formed and this phase also primarily is a discussion of the 19th century. So in that sense it also has a chronologic.

It also lays a chronological foundation to the course and from this phase the 19th century phase of colonial modernity 19th century and early 20th century from this phase we move on to the novels of the 1930s and 1950s and this is certainly very important segment in our discussion. This is also these 2 decades they also frame a major part of our discussion as far as this course is concerned and also when we are talking about the major periods in the history of Indian Fiction in English.

This is undoubtedly one of the beginning which has been located by many of the historians and critics. So the novels of the 1930s, 40s, and 50s they are also characterized by a very fervent Gandhian nationalism and also the ideals related to independence. We find in the 1930s and 40s we have the pre-independence period and also in the late 40s and early 50s there is the anxiety and the hopes and the newer kinds of articulations of post independence India.

And in this phase which has been across the pre-independence and the post independence period we find the coming together of a nation. We find that the novel as a genre is aiding the process of nation building is aiding the process of a group of people becoming 1 in the name of the nation and there are many other things we shall be discussing as part of this, the particularly the influence of Gandhi and many ways in which nation begins to come together in the name of a single course which is anti colonial as well as pro-nationalist.

And there is a brief phase of lull in the 1960s and 70s which we would notice that are also multiple ways of looking at which we shall be doing in the coming sessions we find that there are women writers who are emerging that are also different kinds of Indian writings which are beginning to immerge that is also the phase when the nation as a whole is undergoing such a kind of fragmentation, kind of the dissolution with be promises of modernity.

And with the promises of independence which was given to the nation in the 1940s and 1950s and it is in this context that we approach the post 1980s which is primarily the post Rushdie's decade and this decade rather the decades after the 1980s it has been described in multiple ways, Rushdiesques after Rushdiesques of course postcolonial given the particular kind of positioning that the nation has in the contemporary.

And this phase is also described as the contemporary phase of Indian writing in English and incidentally we also find more international recognition, visibility, and attention being given to this body of writing in Indian Fiction in English and we also in that context discuss the many politics and the different kinds of discussions related to the publishing scene to market the politics behind the awards etc. Now let me work you through the set of novels that we shall be discussing as part of this course.

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Novels

- o *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee - 1864, 1935
- o *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand - 1935
- o *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao - 1938
- o *Waiting for the Mahatma* by R K Narayan - 1955
- o *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai - 1963
- o *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* by Arun Joshi - 1971
- o *Heat and Dust* by Ruth Praver Jhabvala - 1975

Some of them are meant for detailed study and some of them will only be introduced to you by way of the presentations made by students. This list may look very long to you, but however it is a good idea to be at least partially familiar with most of the works that we discuss as part of this course. This will give you a general understanding of this entire oeuvre and also enable you to engage with more similar works from different parts of the world.

We begin by looking at *Rajmohan's wife* which is the first novel written in English and which is the first novel written in English in India. This was published in a serialized form in 1864 and the entire book came out. It came out in the form of a book only in 1935 this was by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee who also interestingly shifted entirely to writing in Bengali after this first work *Rajmohan's wife* which is also been considered as a false start by him.

And we do not devote much time to a close reading of *Rajmohan's wife*. We introduce the work to you and also try to situate it in the contemporary, particularly with reference to one of the important essays by Meenakshi Mukherjee which tries to situate the contemporary relevance of *Rajmohan's wife* and the larger history of Indian Fiction in English. We look at *Untouchable* by Mulk Raj Anand the novel published in 1935 and one of his most successful and well claimed novels and as part of this course.

We shall be looking at *untouchable* and *God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy almost in tandem because both engage with the idea of caste. So in the structure of the course we shall not necessarily be going in this chronological fashion as this list shows. We talk about *Kanthapura* by Raja Rao in 1938 that is a novel which has been positioned as the most important early novel in the history of Indian writing in English.

It is also one of the first earlier novels to successfully talk about Gandhian nationalism and to situate its relevancy in the literary oeuvre. We discussed *waiting for the Mahatma* by R K Narayan, it is a novel published in 1955 again one of his very successful works can you also find a different kind of nationalism at work, a different kind of Gandhi being projected whilst of *Kanthapura*.

And let me also remind you that as and when we are going through these discussions as part of this course I want you to not look at these works in isolation but to be able to see the connections, the relations which are being highlighted between these works because the beauty of this course, the beauty of this discussion lies in being able to see the connections, the interconnections, the inter-textuality.

And also how eventually we begin to find a subtle pattern emerging out of these discussions. It is coming back to the list of text to be discussed. We have *Cry, the Peacock* by Anita Desai in 1963 one of the foremost women writers in Indian writing in English. We talk about how Indian women novelist are positioned and how the 1960s and 70s are generally been seen as a period of lull in the larger history.

But nevertheless we see up prolific output by a number of woman novelist such as Anita Desai and instantly Anita Desai was also one of the earliest women writers in Indian who found international recognition and also got significant recognition within the home academy as well. Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* published in 1971 was a path breaking work and it is said that and it is often said that if there Rushdiesques moment had not come in the early 1980s.

Perhaps Arun Joshi would have received better kind of attention and the other thing which shared was the presence and the visibility of Arun Joshi in the contemporary is the availability or rather the unavailability of his works in international editions because he always continued to publish with test orient paper backs. And that brings it to this very interesting novelist Ruth Pravar Jhabvala and her Booker winning work *Heat and Dust* which is published in 1975.

And this is a very interesting fact to begin with the Ruth Pravar Jhabvala. She enjoys much attention and visibility because she is the only writer to have received an academy award as well as a booker prize and how her work *Heat and Dust*, though it did not receive much of an attention in the literary academies within India continues to be seen as one of the most important works by Jhabvala and Jhabvala also has a very interesting and a very contested kind of identity because she was not born in India.

She is not an Indian and she came to India because she was married to an Indian man and she also spent a considerable period of her youth living in this country and that has also given the peculiar kind of flavour to her writing, because she writes in between this place which is between the insider and the outsider. She is not entirely an insider, but one cannot dismiss her as an outsider either. She writes about the uncomfortable positions that she had to take.

She writes about the many challenges that she faces, but and the same time she is acutely familiar with the many flavours with only an insider would be familiar with. So this entire texts could be, so this entire set of texts could be based upon the discussion and the first phase where we look mostly and the early 19th century phase. Then we look at the pre-independence and the post-independence phase and we also look at the development of the genre, the emergence of the genre in the years immediately after the event of independence.

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Post 1980s ✓

- o *Midnight's Children* by Rushdie- 1981
- o *The Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh - 1988
- o *The Trotter Nama* by Allan Sealy - 1988
- o *Ice Candy Man* by Bapsi Sidhwa - 1991
- o *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy - 1996

And this leads us to the most important phase post 1980s which is characterized by Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* which was published in 1981 and also begin to realize that much of the discussion of the post 1980s is heavily over shadowed and heavily dictated by how *Midnight's Children* was received how the *Midnight's children* was read and how *Midnight's children* continues to dictate the terms of publication and the terms of literalistic even in the contemporary.

We look at the *Shadow Lines* by Amitav Ghosh which is published in 1988 which is considered as one of the most brilliant narratives about the nation looking at the ways in which the nations nation has been partitioned in from an elective prospective. Ghosh enjoys a very unique position in the history of Indian writing in English. His work *Shadow Lines* has been very well accepted

and it will not be an exaggeration to say that it is rather difficult to find negative reviews about this novel, the Shadow Lines.

It also remains one of the all time favourites of most of the readers of Indian Fiction in English and then we look at the Trotter Nama by Allan Sealy which was published in 1988. This is considered as one of the works which could be considered at par with Midnight's Children, but however due to its less visibility and to the unavailability of the text in the contemporary this is not received the kind of academic that is due to it. An Ice Candy Man by Bapsi Sidhwa is a partition novel.

It talks about the violence and the many personal struggles which were inherent in this political event of the partition of India and Pakistan. Bapsi Sidhwa also enjoys a unique kind of position because of her identity. She is a Pakistani writer, but her work particularly the Ice Candy Man has been included as part of the larger oeuvre of Indian Fiction in English. The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy published in 1996 was really considered as the guest Booker event.

After Midnight Children by Rushdie and post 1980s in that sense is extremely important in assuring and ensuring very different kind of international recognition and opening of an international market for not just these Booker events, but also for the many young writers who were trying their fortune in Indian fiction in English and when we look at post 1980s.

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Post-1980s and the contemporary

- o *Riot: A Novel* by Shashi Tharoor - 2001
- o *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh - 2004
- o *English, August* by Upamanyu Chatterjee- 1988
- ✓ o *The White Tiger* by Arvind Adiga - 2008
- o *The Inheritance of Loss* by Kiran Desai - 2006
- o *Zelaldinus: A Masque* by Allan Sealy - 2017

And when we try and understand the ways in which this is opened at the market and opened at the readership of this genre in multiple ways we see a prolific output as far as the public is concerned but we limited discussion to certain very visible names and we also make this selection based on the critical attention with some of these writers and some of these works have received we look at *Riot*:

A novel by Shashi Tharoor published in 2001, *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh published in 2004 this is also the second novel by Amitav Ghosh that we shall be looking at as part of this course. There is *English, August* by Upamanyu Chatterjee published in 1988 though this is a 1980s work the general understanding and the discussions as part of *English, August* is more contemporary in nature which is why this has been pushed to our contemporary phase.

The White Tiger by Arvind Adiga published in 2008 is yet another Booker event and also Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* published in 2006 both these both Booker events in rather adjacent years that was also an important phase in the history of Indian Fiction in English and also for the accentuating the kind of position that this genre had not just in the national scenario, but also in the international scenario and we ended discussion by looking at this different kind of work *Zelaldinus*:

A Masque by Allan Sealy. This was published in 2017 though this is partly written in a worse as the title imply as the subtitle implies A Masque. This has been categorized as fiction and also this enables as to talk about the man interesting experiments that in writing in English has been engaging in particularly in the contemporary and how the international market and the national academies have opened themselves up to receiving these newer kinds of experiments coming from the writers of Indian fiction in English. We also look at 2 short stories.

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Short stories

o *Laburnum for my Head* by Temsula Ao - 2009

o "Remains of the Feast" by Gita Hariharan - 2004

Laburnum for my Head by Temsula Ao one of the north eastern writers as short story collection, published in 2009. We look at a couple of short stories from this collection. We will also look at very interesting short story by Gita Hariharan published in 2004. Its title remains in the feat. Due to time constraints we may not be able to deal in detail with all of these works which is rather obvious as well, but however we try and bring in discussions.

And also introducing you to the different critical traditions which have projected these particular works and while as part of this course we may not be able to offer detailed summaries. We introduce you to different ways of looking at the text, reading the text, and also seen in connections between them and placing them in the larger context of literary studies and for this as stated in the beginning stated at the outset of this course of the earlier pre-requisite is that you should already be familiar with the readings which are prescribed as part of this course including the novels, short stories and the critical writings.

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Bookered events

Why not Naipaul for this course?
An Indo-Caribbean writer born in
Trinidad with British citizenship

		V.S Naipaul In A Free State (1971)
		Arundhati Roy The God of Small Things (1981)
		Salman Rushdie Midnights Children (1997)
		Kiran Desai The Inheritance of Loss (2006)
		Arvind Adiga The White Tiger (2008)

Hari introduced set of works that we shall be discussing against part of this course. I want you to be alert of the fact that we shall be looking at the connections interconnections across these works in multiple ways. One of the things that seem to be tying at least to some of the works together is that they were all Bookered events. In fact, the very possibility of highlighting this as a separate genre in Indian Fiction in English.

And also the possibility of offering this as a separate course as an entire course itself rests largely, if not entirely in the many Bookered events which ensured visibility and critical attention to this genre. In the late 1970s, when the genre was almost declared dead by number critics, what helped the resurrection of this genre was the major Bookered event, Salman Rushdie's novel. So the Bookered events discussion of these Bookered events also become a major part of this course as well.

As part of this course and the critical tradition that it accesses you may begin to notice that the discussions about the Bookered events start mostly with Salman Rushdie and Salman Rushdie's work in fact it received the Booker prize, it won the Booker of Bookers. It was again basically selected as the best of all the booked literary works and this is notwithstanding the fact that there were 2 writers beforehand who received the Booker price.

One is V. S. Naipaul and other is Ruth Praver Jhabvala whose work we shall be discussing as part of this course and of course we shall be discussing Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and Arvind Adiga. So at the outset in this introductory session itself I would like to clarify that we shall not be discussing V.S. Naipaul as part of this course on Indian Fiction in English. While he has also written a fiction we are not including V.S. Naipaul because of the peculiar kind of definition that we have adopted for the idea of Indian.

Naipaul is an Indo-Caribbean writer who was born in Trinidad and he holds British citizenship and by far he has got no lived experience in India. So while Jhabvala, who is not an Indian in a certain way has got lived experience and writes about it. We have not really select Naipaul for the same reason and this being clarified I also introduce you to the multiple frameworks within which we will be discussing the texts prescribed.

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We discuss

- o The nation and its stories
- o Secularism and the secular self
- o Partition, Emergency
- o Post-Ayodhya events and communal riots
- o The 'othering' based on religion, gender, region and language
- o Caste, its minimal presence and many absences

We shall be talking about the nation and its many stories unlike and earlier generation of the pre-independence period when there was only 1 kind of story of the nation which was been highlighted in the post 1980s we have many different kinds of stories being told by different kind of people. I have also talked about the implications of secularism and the secular self particularly in the creation of Indian Fiction in English.

And how in general the plot structure is also benefited or also much informed by the understanding of secularism and the secular self. We talked about how major national events just partition and emergency. They find a way into the narratives as far this genre is concerned. We talk about certain post-Ayodhya events and communal riots which also occupy a central space particularly in the post 1980s fiction we talk about the different kinds of “Othering” based religion, gender, region, and language.

We have tried to bring in the critical understanding from different disciplines and from different perspectives and view points to enable our reading of a particular novel. We also finally talk about caste which is difficult to find at the outset far as this genre is concerned. So we will be talking what it is minimal presence alone, so the many absences as far as our caste is concerned. There are certain texts which would lend itself to the discussion of caste in a easier way.

But we also talk about what precisely is the challenge when we begin to talk about caste in this space and an international space such as Indian Fiction in English. Having given a detailed outline of how the course has been structured and conceived. I would like to leave you with these thoughts. These are some of the expected outcomes of this course.

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Expected outcome

- o Familiarity with the domain and a few representative texts
- o Enabling the learners to explore more
- o Developing the skills for critical enquiry and academic research

At this end of this course I expected to be familiar with the domain and at least a few representative texts. Of course we shall not be able to familiarize ourselves with all kinds of

works produced as part of this genre, but the familiarity with this domain will I hopefully help you to make an informed decision in selection so as to choose your further readings and this cause at the end of it will enable the learners to explore more.

Explore more not just in terms of the novels and short stories, but also in terms of the many critical traditions which will enable your understanding of one particular literary domain. It will also help you to see the connections and the intellectual references across texts and also across periods and finally last but not the least one of the foremost things that I look forward to imparting is part of the course are the skills with critical enquiry and academic research.

So this course in that sense is not presented as an isolated discussion of a series of texts which bare the label Indian Fiction in English, but it has been presented and the entire discussions are staged in such a way that they will open up avenues to interact with other disciplines, other frameworks and other prospective and hopefully this course will also give you a taste for exploring and for reading more of such similar texts. That is all we have for today by way of introduction. Thank you for listening and I look forward to see you in the next session.