

Indian Fiction in English
Prof. Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology–Madras

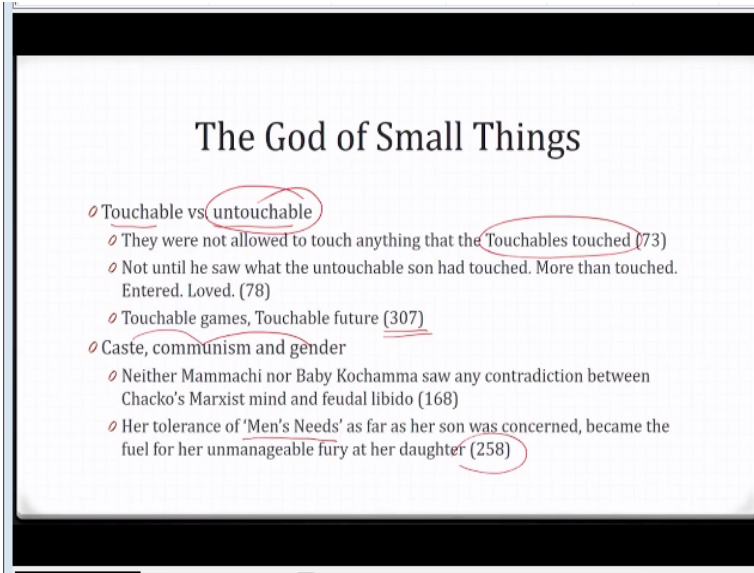
Lecture-25b
Other Representations of caste in IE fiction

Hello everyone welcome today's session the objective of today's lecture is 2 fold, one is to some of the discussion in the context of constant to god of small things. And second one is also to introduce you to a set of other text in this body of writing and fiction English where caste gets discussed. We had been looking in detail at the different ways on which caste gets manifested caste gets rotate or represented in mainly 2 novels untouchable and god of small of things.

And I also invite you to enter into a more detail discussion of the vertical ways are which caste is used as an enter point to critique the many social systems which are inherent in the Indian fabric. So, we find Arudhathi Roy very skillfully using caste as incidental have thing as an incidental category to critique where is at the related this causes is, so just poverty or politics and even gender. While critiques like Ajay Sekher and (()) (01:26) have located the inability of the novel to push past beyond certain hierarchical systems and boundaries.

It is also important to realize that it certainly enables to ask questions which way either to and ask, it is also enables us to use caste as an entry point to open up I have an use for new kinds of discussion.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:54)



In the god of small things there is a play on these two terms touchable and untouchable. The untouchable community which could also be seen as a category the schedule caste they are pitched against the upper caste who are referred to as touchable is in this novel. It is by way of marking the way in which the term untouchable has been kind and there are certain accepts from the novel which I try to use in is in illustration to show how this word touchable and untouchable.

I used as synonyms words in order to particularly bring out the irrationality which is inherent in the coining of this term untouchable. In page 73 we are introduced to certain episode where we are introduced to Valetta and his background. So, we also get a sense of how hierarchically traditionally untouchability operator. And let me remind you that the entire narrative even while it is in the third person.

It is through the point of view, form the point of view these twins Estha and Rahel. So, there is a simplification of caste and it is practices which also brings out the whole episode. So, here I will while we are being imitated into the context the background of the traditional hierarchical practice of untouchability. This is the explanation given they were not allowed the untouchables.

They were not allowed to touch anything that the Touchables touched. So, there is a lot of focus a lot of play on the term touch, touchable. And what can be touched and what cannot be touched

because the entire premise is the basic premise of caste. So, also based on the purity, pollution dichotomy where touch plays as significant. If you recall there is a brief instance in the novel *Untouchable* where the moment of (04:05) the character that the Dalit character *Untouchable*.

This moment of epiphany happens when he accidentally touches an upper caste man on the way. And we also know the series of events that unfolded. And in pages 78 we come across Velutha's father's encounter in this truth that Velutha's son is having an affair with the masters' women in the master's family with Ammu. And he is unable to come to terms with this fact that his son was being totally disloyal to the family which was patronizing them for over decades now.

And this is how he responds not until he saw what the untouchable son had touched more than touched. So, here as we pointed out as we spoke about how caste is older and everything older than communism older than Church older than all British colonial encounters witnessed. So, caste is older than all kinds of laws and love laws this becomes perhaps the most unforgivable kind of sin that a touchable son could commit.

And he would realize that more than the affair what brings a lot of grief and anger to the families is a fact that this affair is between touchable women and an untouchable man. And there are also references to touchable games and touchable future to which the access of the untouchable man is denied. This reference comes in page 307 where the chapter history house which has also part of this chapter history house where the one of the climatic scenes of this novel happens where Velutha is beaten to black by the police.

When we look at this strange relation between caste, communism and gender. We realize that, that is a patriarchal which dominates and overpowers all of these 3 together. This is very much evident in the way the family responds to Chacko's advances Chacko's sexual advances to other women who also the underprivileged women who are who come mostly as servants in page 168.

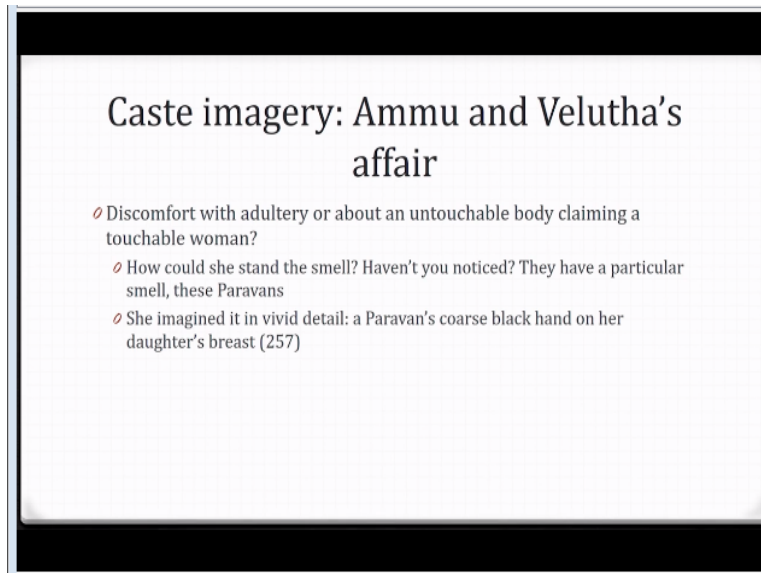
We find this neither Mammachi nor baby Kochamma saw any contradiction between Chacko's Marxist mind and feudal libido. Chacko is an Oxford educated man whose political beliefs rest in

Maxicism and communism he is a self declared communist. He is also known as one such a liberated individual in the locality but his libido comes across being very futile. And the family does not see any mismatch any dicatomy in this maxcist mind.

And futile libido go existing together and we also find the women in the family justifying this in page 258 her tolerance of men's needs as far as a son was concerned became the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter. So, Ammu's transcription is seen as an unforgettable sin for which the untouchable man has to pay with his life yeah. We know that Velutha investigated killed by the police.

But Chackos needs Chackos libido has sexual needs are tolerated in fact it is even justified as mens needs. There is even a promotion made within the family where women can come and go without getting noticed by others.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:19)



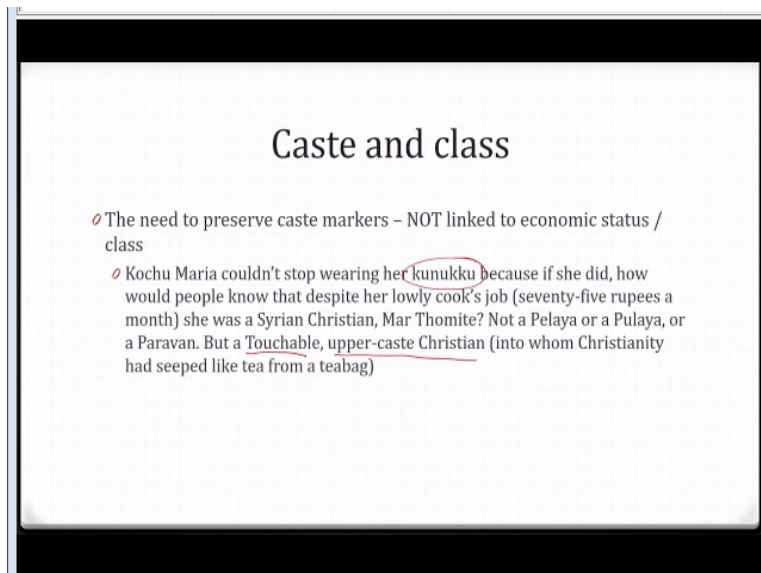
The caste imageries especially in the portrayal of Ammu's and Velutha's affair and this is and the way that this is gets narrated it brings out the horror and the unspeakability of such an association. So, viding into wonder with that is comfort is with adultery of Ammu and Velutha. Ammu being a divorcee is this a discomfort with adultery or is it about an untouchable body claiming a touchable woman which becomes a larger kind of transcription which totally defies all kinds of hierarchical divisions.

We find a one of the women one how could she stand the smell haven't you noticed. They have a particular smell these paravans. Paravan is the caste name the caste category to which Velutha belongs and it is also uses a derogatory term. She imagined it in vivid detail a paravan's coarse black hand on her daughter's breast.

So what is more organizing for them is the fact that there is black untouchable body claiming this touchable women which by extension becomes a violation of their aristocratic past where identity which they claim to have a share teenage with that of the upper caste Brahmins in Kerala.

So, we find at a little difficult to understand whether the families discomfort is with the act itself all about the fact that the one of the agents in this act the untouchable man paravan he is not supposed to do this. He is not supposed to claim touchable body and this difference between caste and classes brought out quite wonderfully in this brief passage in the novel.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:07)



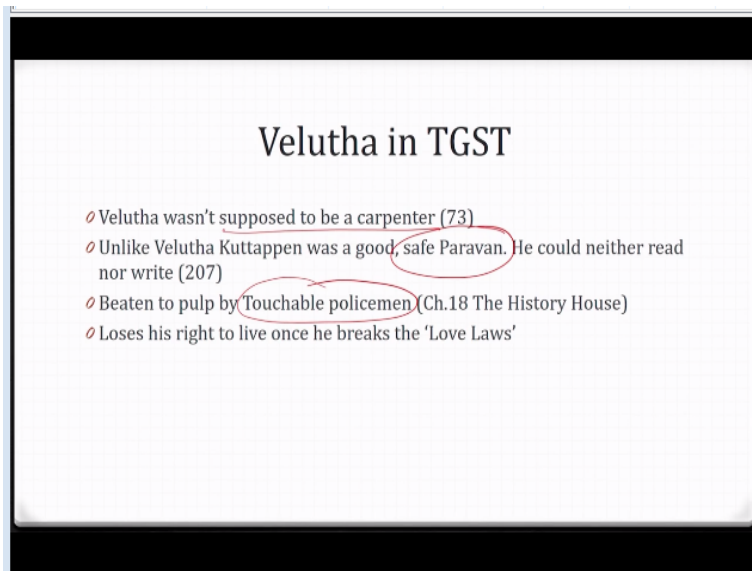
There is this character Kochu Maria whose cook in the family but we find at she also feels the need to preserve her caste status by this playing particular caste markers. And we also realize that caste is not linked here with economic status or class. Kochu Maria wants to showcase here caste identity her upper caste identity by varying on herself certain peculiar markers. And in this case

it is a kunnuku which is a different kind of an earring worn by upper caste Syrian Christian women.

So, Kochu Maria could not stop wearing her kunnuku because if she dead. How would people know that despite her lowly cook's job 75 rupees a month? She was a Syrian Christian Mar Thomite? Not a Pelaya or a Pulaya or a Paravan. But a Touchable, upper-caste Christian into whom Christianity had seeped like tea from a teabag. In this seemingly simple narration the Irony the sacasion is very hartamas. Kochu Maria knows that her status is a lowly one, she gets paid a mere some of a petty some of 75 rupees a month in spite of that she thinks that she is far better than a Pelaya Pulaya or Paravan.

Because she is a Syrian Christian and this is the kunukku the marker of this upper caste identity is perhaps a only claim to social mobility the only marker in herself which would differentiate her from save the other lowly individuals such as an untouchable person. And this is very interesting because caste operates in a totally different way unlike class where economic status and the other such a variable also a play a role. And Velutha's character in the god of small things there are certain similarities that we can identify between the Velutha and Bhaka just like Bhaka stands out as a different kind of a scavenger.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:25)



Velutha in TGST

- ◊ Velutha wasn't supposed to be a carpenter (73)
- ◊ Unlike Velutha Kuttappen was a good, safe Paravan. He could neither read nor write (207)
- ◊ Beaten to pulp by Touchable policemen (Ch.18 The History House)
- ◊ Loses his right to live once he breaks the 'Love Laws'

We find that Velutha was not supposed to be a carpenter this appears quite early in the novel. When the Velutha's character is introduced towards we find velutha being politically very active participating in political rallies having an opinion of his own. And his gate his body language it does not really reflect the identity or the behavior of other lower caste other paravans.

And a midway through the novel there is a statement unlike Velutha Kuttapen was a good, safe Paravan. He could neither read nor write, so this is an aspect which differentiates Velutha from that of Bhaka here we find that while Velutha is presented as a perfect character. And almost perfect character we find that he is not a safe Paravan he is presented in a rather daring way given the limited context of Indian fiction English.

We find that he comes across as someone who can clearly being integrated incorporated into the upper caste believe as well. Because until that moment when he trans crisis that boundary where he goes onto claim the touchable women under that moment he is allowed to exist he is allowed be what he is though people did have different differences of opinion about that but we realize that the moment the transcreation is made his safety is at of risk.

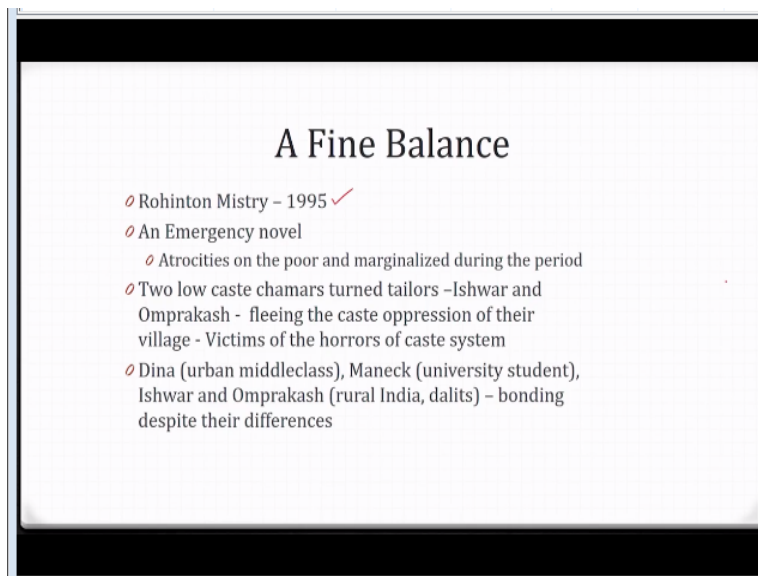
Because he is expectable he can be expectable as a safe paravan only if he stays away from all the other things which the touchable community also has a claim which the touchable community also has access for. And he comes across a despite his lowly status understands politics, understands the intercessions of the society in which he is placed. And that also becomes a factor which totally leads to an extremely risky possession as for as he is concerned.

And in chapter 18 in the history house where he is beaten to pulp where Velutha is beaten to pulp it is particularly mention that he is beaten to pulp by touchable policemen. So, we find if the policemen could be seen as symbols of power as symbols of system of a society of administration of a nation. We will find that Velutha is twitted against the system itself it is a touchable policemen who find it convenient for personal political and administrative reasons to push and down.

And the reason being the one major intercessions the one major act of intercessions that he did by breaking the love laws. We find that Velutha completely loses his right to left once he breaks the love laws and interestingly. We find that there are many many things which we seem to be permissible within the context of this novel. But this claiming of a touchable women the sexual intercessions in term of crossing the hierarchal boundaries of caste.

It comes across is being extremely costly as far as Velutha's life is concern. Now we also take very quick look at some of the other novels which also engage with caste in vary integrates though a fine balance.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:07)



The second novel by Rohinton Mistry was published in 1995 this is widely known as an emergency novel. Because it was the other background it is written in the back trap of the event of emergency focusing particularly on the atrocities on the poor and marginalized during the period of emergency. There are two low caste chamars Ishwar and Omprakash two characters who initially fleeing the caste oppression of their village.

And the portrayers' victims of the horrors of caste system but what awaits them in this city which is presumably Bombay. It is even was we find that even the urban system even the government administration especially during the emergency period. They heavily crack down on mostly the poor and the margin less and the homeless once. And that is a very strange bonding

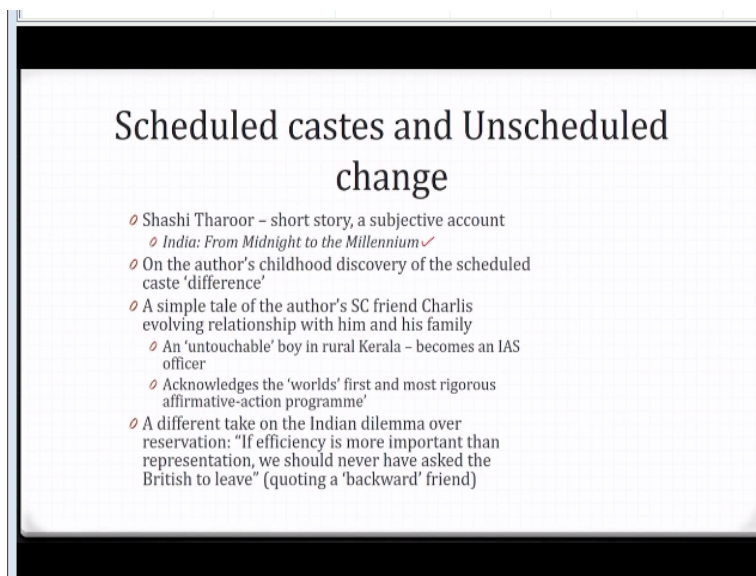
whether it we find across 4 people who are from 3 different social classes Dina (0) (17:03)
women who belongs to an urban middle class

Maneck who is a university student and Ishwar and Omprakash belong to the rural India and who are Dalit's, there is a bonding despite their differences during this period emergency. Because it is a difficult time for all of them but we also see that as and when the difficult if the political situation we can see away the caste differences get height and then accentuated just like before.

Maneck the young student who was initially friendly with Eshwar and Omprakash who was initially quit fond of Eshwar and Omprakash. We find that he stops communicating with them on being warned by one of his relatives to stop this introduction with low cast men. We do fine the sympathetic telling a sympathetic portrayal of Dalit's in this novel of fine balance.

But also critique that the narration sound unbelievable and there is a certain anxiety as if you have pointed out mysterious narration. Because he stannite to make he is trying to deliberately incorporate the Dalit's into this narrative space and many feel that it is not become a successful nevertheless we do a find these two characters playing an important role in this novel a fine balance.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:28)



Scheduled castes and Unscheduled change

- ◊ Shashi Tharoor - short story, a subjective account
 - ◊ *India: From Midnight to the Millennium* ✓
- ◊ On the author's childhood discovery of the scheduled caste 'difference'
- ◊ A simple tale of the author's SC friend Charlis evolving relationship with him and his family
 - ◊ An 'untouchable' boy in rural Kerala - becomes an IAS officer
 - ◊ Acknowledges the 'worlds' first and most rigorous affirmative-action programme'
- ◊ A different take on the Indian dilemma over reservation: "If efficiency is more important than representation, we should never have asked the British to leave" (quoting a 'backward' friend)

This a short story by a Shashi Taruoor title scheduled caste and unscheduled change it is section from his book India from Midnight to the Millennium it could be seen as a short story or as a subjective account. And it is when republished in a couple father text as well and this is in account of the author's childhood discovery of the scheduled caste difference. It is a written in the first person narrative.

And it is based on childhood experience that he had in his answer for home about his relation the brief childhood friendship that he had with a lower caste boy. And it could be considered as a simple tale of the author's friend from the schedule caste category which is whose named Charlis and entire short story outlines the evolving relationship that Charlis has with the author and with his family initially we find the family of the author being extremely kind in generous to Charlis.

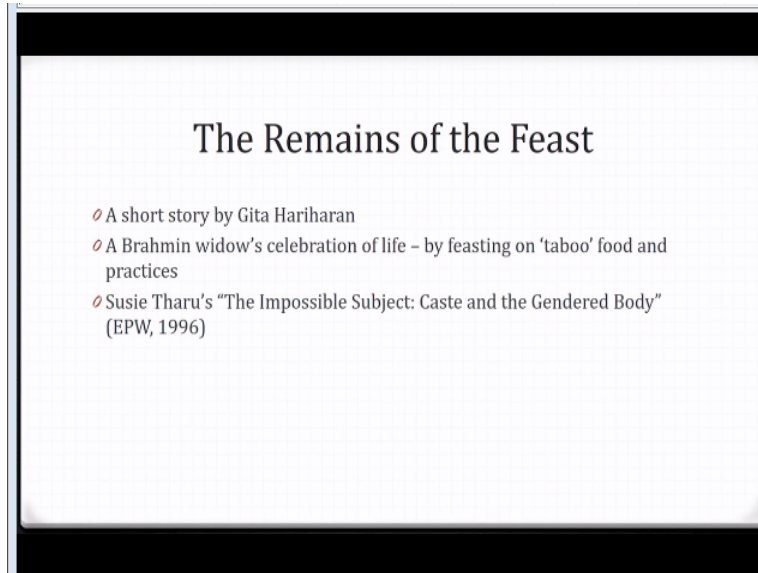
And he also ends up becoming the IAS officer that is a total twist that happens towards the end of the story. And Taroor uses as to read to acknowledge the world's first and most rigorous affirmation affirmative-action programed which is the caste based reservation. And this is entirely different take on the Indian dilemma over reservation coating a back would friend in the story we find Taroor also echoing this view is efficiency is more important than representation.

We should never have ask the British to leave without and getting into a debate about reservation it is important to notice that there are though sporadic certain voices like this which certainly need to be engaged with more forcefully. And it also begins to appeal that Indian fiction English it does try to engage with caste with the point of view perspective remains entirely the middle class urban.

And in a way that gives voice or tries to rather take over the voice of the marginalized the schedule caste and the schedule tribes. The tribes almost invisible as so good begin to also analyze in notice it is difficult to save whether the roots story takes as stance or not. He also tries to take sympathetic view towards Charlis and the likes like him and tries to see the positive impact of this act of reservation of affirmative action.

But one begins to wonder way the certain buyers as of at a middle class Indian which is also crept into this short story having a (()) (21:21) also remains one, one of the powerful discussions about caste based on a subjective account.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:32)

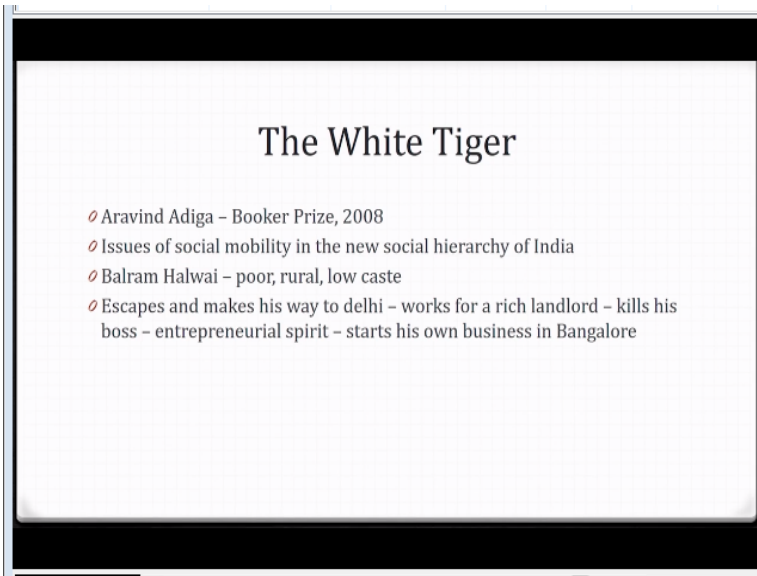


This is short story by Gita Hariharan title the remains of the feast which you which we should also be looking at in the Vanathi later sessions. This is about a Brahmin widow's celebration of life by feasting on taboo food and practices towards the end of her life and Susie Tharu's essay The impossible Subject Caste and the Gendered Body tries to analyze Gita Hariharan's work looking at the portrayal of caste at this that also remains as that whenever we talk about caste.

We try to look for the lower caste figure biggest the caste of the upper caste individual the upper caste community is rendered invisible. But caste markers are there just like a gender is attributed when we may be talk about gender studies it is in variably about women. In the same way when one talks about a caste or caste studies it becomes something to do with a lower caste never about the upper caste.

Here Tharu's essay is an interrogation into this prevalent common sense and she tries to completely unback the way in which we look at caste and in the representation of caste in a work of fiction. This is a work that w shall come back to locate in one of the later sessions.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:53)



And finally we look at *The White Tiger* again a work which we try to do in detail in a later session. Aravind Adiga's Booker prize winning novel there is steeped with issues of social mobility in the new hierarchy of India. There is this character of Balram Halwai whose poor who belongs to the low lands and he is also lower caste. He has an interesting story to tell in the form of letters to Chinese premium.

He escapes and makes his way to Delhi he works for a rich landlord. He is highly successful he is very efficient but he ends up killing his boss. He is driven by a very powerful strong entrepreneur spirit. There is no sense of a guilt he does not surrender instead he leaves for Bangalore and starts his own business. So, this is a rootless by Balram Halwai who goes to write as from Bangalore in a non-conventional way.

There have been critiques about this presentation of the new India there have been a lot of discomfort articles later about though way this kind of a social mobility was written about but nevertheless the presence of this lower caste character makes the telling of the stories slightly different. So, one also begins to wonder whether assemblies to we can be told say about a man who belongs to different caste story different religion.

And these as certain questions perhaps one should begin to ask why we are critiquing the representations of caste in Indian English fiction. And I hope these insights have been quite useful

feel to begin on a new journey of understanding Indian writing in English. And I also hope that you would also use your own sources and your own reading to come up with more interesting critiques and analysis in a similar context, I thank you for listening I look forward to see you in the next session.