

Indian Fiction in English
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Lecture - 06
The Critical Tradition of Indian Fiction in English

So were did we end in the last session, the last time we met what were we talking about? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** we were discussing Meenakshi Mukherjee's essay and we were (()) (00:28) purpose. Okay what did we discuss about Meenakshi Mukherjee what kind of things were she talking about Indian English, go back to your notes and tell me.

She also wrote Indian Fiction in English as (()) (00:50) yes very good, **“Professor - student conversation ends”** that this point lies in the heart of Meenakshi Mukherjee's discussion because Mehrotra and many others they were talking about Indian English writing as an offshoot of colonial modernity as an offshoot of a legacy that the British had left behind. So Mukherjee is telling us that it is also important to look at it as a native tradition.

To take into account the various other cultural you know impulses which were at work, to look at the ways in which you know it also reflect some of the traditional narratives. She is not really taking a very nativist position and disregarding the colonial legacy but she is arguing for the need to have a fresh kind of historical approach towards Indian fiction and Indian novel itself.

And in the next few sessions in the fact even when we are discussing today and also in the discussions that you would be doing as part of individual novels, you will find that you know you will be time and again going back to Meenakshi Mukherjee because from the 70s one could even say you know till the year she died there is a way in which she had been continuously contributing to the history, the criticism of Indian writing in English.

And when we talk about the scholarship which is associated with the Indian fiction in English it is difficult to overlook many things that she said because either most of the traditions, most of the criticisms which came after it was all either you know in some way they were taking off from what Meenakshi Mukherjee spoke about or they were departing in significant ways away from what she said.

So she would be informing most of our discussions for a while and we would also note that many of the important things which are of significant concern for Indian writing in English particularly Indian Fiction in English, Meenakshi Mukherjee had always had something or the other to say about it.

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So today we are focusing on 2 essays. First one is Pilgrim Prose and the Novel of Purpose this is from Meenakshi Mukherjee’s work Realism and Reality, and also on this chapter on the beginnings of the Indian novel this is from Mehrotra’s literary history. So just to also give you a sense of how Meenakshi Mukherjee readings can also be looked at from an alternate point of view.

Particularly from the point of view of Dalit writing and you know the perspective of cast. You also take care very brief look at Dilip Menon’s essay, A Place Elsewhere: Lower caste Malayalam novels of the 19th century and this is from his own book Blindness of Insight which came out in 2006.

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Why?

- To draw attention to how the dominant conceptual /theoretical frameworks emerged in the study of Indian English novel
- To illustrate how the beginnings, the trajectory and the development of novel were historically situated

So why we are looking at Meenakshi Mukherjee, again why we are talking about certain historical sense again though because you know as you know we started talking about the need to historically situate Indian fiction in English, this is the 4th or 5th class that we are having again talking about the need to situate it historically because it is also important to.

What Meenakshi Mukherjee does is, she is trying to look at it from the point of view of an historian. She is trying to locate Indian writing in English and Indian novel in general in a very historical way. She is trying to situate it in a historical way, but at the same time she is also responsible for foregrounding certain conceptual and theoretical frameworks which could be used in the study of Indian English novel and those frameworks quite surprisingly and very interesting they continue to remain as a dominant framework.

You can only depart from the frameworks that Meenakshi Mukherjee had put forward and it also talks about the beginnings, the trajectory and the development of novel because those there was a general sense that all of these were the products of colonial modernity, but she undertakes the more detailed task of situating the origins and how certain moments can be identified as you know more apt beginnings than the other.

So those are the specific things that she goes on to do and this is the second chapter of her work Realism and Reality.

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The novel of purpose

- o The development of novel in India – the indirect result of the spread of English education and consequent exposure to Victorian literature
 - o The 'prose' - also shaped by the colonial enterprise
 - o Serampore mission press
 - o Translation of the Bible into Indian languages
 - o The missionary enterprise supported by administrative efforts
 - o Questionable literary value?
 - o Secular prose?
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And here she talks about how development of novel is again an indirect result of the spread of English education and the consequent exposure to Victorian literature and hear you know what is more important is that she is not focusing on the event of the Minutes, she is not focusing on the say the colonial enterprises the only force or the prime force behind the production of these sorts of writings.

Which is why you knowing she talks about the indirect result of the spread of English education and the consequent exposure to Victorian literature and she is talking about the range of other things which shaped the prose in English. She is not talking about the novelistic enterprises per se, she is taking us through a journey of historical journey through a range of colonial enterprises.

Such as you know the establishment of the Serampore mission press, the translation of the Bible which she also identifies as a very significant event, but this the missionary enterprise which also had a commendable support from the administrative side, she talks about it with a bit of a scepticism as well because she thinks the prose which came into being.

The prose in English as well as the prose in the Vernacular languages which came into effect after the translations of Bible and many other Christian literatures into different languages, she says those sort of work perhaps had a very questionable literary value and these notions about the secular prose and the religious prose and how she differentiates one from the other, this in fact has also had a lot of bearing on the way in which we talk about good literature and bad literature.

We talk about whether certain works are literary or non-literary. In fact, Dilip Menon's work also comes into you know plays an important role in this context because he says maybe you know whenever she is talking about religion, it was not entirely about religion, it was also about caste. So Dilip Menon also wonders, Dilip Menon does not really you know in dialogue with Meenakshi Mukerjee.

But there is a way in which we can bring both the text together, but Dilip Menon and Ajanta Sircar some of those people that we shall be taking a look at it at a later point, Gauri Viswanathan, so they all feel that by relegating these 2 say camps secular literature and religious literature. In religious literature here also been predominantly Christian literature because those were also you know the kind of writings.

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Christianity's contribution

- o Fiction written by Christians - 'originally so or converts' - mid 1900s
- o Hannah Catherine Mullens - Bengali
- o Mrs Collins - English (based in Kerala)
- o G S Gurney - Assamese
- o Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai - Tamil
- o Joseph Muliyl - Malayalam

Mukherjee offers a critical discussion / evaluation of these novels

She talks about Christianity's contribution particularly when she talks about religious literature and she talks about fiction written by Christians either original Christians or the Christians who convert or the natives who converted into Christianity in the mid-1900s. So here when she talks about these novels and these are all in fact novelist who wrote both in English and as well as you know some of them only in their native languages in Bengali.

And Mrs. Collins was a missionary based in Kerala and she supposedly said to have written the first ever novel which came out in Kerala, but it was also written in English, but there is very little scholarly or critical attention on that, maybe it is primarily because of the way in which Meenakshi Mukherjee identifies the existence of these works, talks about them and

also categorically says that those are not there, the literary value was very question and those are not really secular prose literature that you can engage with.

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Only a 'marginal impact'

o "In the last thirty years there had been only 300 converts of whom 200 were were Pariahs. Seen as a whole, in the nineteenth century the spread of Christianity in India was not a central event socially or culturally. The literary byproducts of missionary activities also turn out to be minor works, contributing only indirectly to the evolution of the novel in India, but the tributaries are important in understanding the mainstream"

Countered by Dilip Menon, Ajanta Sircar

Based on her evaluation in fact we can also take a look at you know one of the things that she says it is also a part of the course material that have given. Meenakshi Mukherjee says in the last 30 years that has been only 300 converts of whom 200 were Pariahs. Seen as a whole in the 19th Century the spread of Christianity in India was not a central event socially or culturally.

The literary byproducts of missionary activities also turn out to be minor works contributing only indirectly to the evolution of novel in India, but the tributaries are important in understanding the mainstream. She is being quite right from a perspective of a historian saying these are only tributaries, those are not like major forces at work.

But the way in which she one cannot really say dismiss, the way in which she marginalises certain literary products in comparison to other kinds of writing that has been seen as a bit problematic by Dilip Menon also by Ajanta Sircar, those are also some of the essays that we shall be taking a look at it at a later point when we particularly talk about caste, in the context of again untouchable and God of Small Things.

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'Other' readings

- Dilip Menon: About the need for a historical and contextual modernity
- Not as novels 'written by Christians/converts'
- Novels dealing with the experience of slave castes in 19th century Kerala
- Exploration of a subaltern imaginary that is excluded from the novels written by the dominant caste of nairs at this historical moment
- Gauri Viswanathan: draws attention to 'the distortions of colonial modernity'

So one of the arguments that Dilip Menon puts forward is that there is a need for looking at modernity from a historical as well as a contextual point of view which is why he says these set of novels we will not go through the details of those which Meenakshi Mukherjee quite you know she gives us a quite a detailed description of those individual works which were produced in different languages and mostly by converts or in some of the cases even by wives of the missionaries.

So and Dilip Menon feels that these novels cannot be perhaps seen as written by Christians or converts maybe there is a caste element which is taken as a merely as an incidental fact and she talks about how there are certain works produced in 19th century in Malayalam in Kerala where religion, conversion to Christianity is not perhaps the dominant thing maybe it is about the experience of slave caste.

And he also wonders whether it becomes convenient for dominant literary critical methods to relegate these aspects into religion and then there by you know gloss over the aspects of caste and he also talks about how these set of novels which Meenakshi Mukherjee puts in the category of Christian novels thereby you know not secular prose.

Dilip Menon wonders whether they in fact are encouraging us to you know go about with an exploration of a subaltern imaginary that is excluded from the novels written by the dominant caste of Nairs at this historical moment. He is also you know doing a comparative study between the other kinds of novels which were emerging in from Kerala written in Malayalam during the same period of time.

During the same time when colonial modernity was you know taking route in Kerala and Gauri Viswanathan's works, *Masks of Conquest*, that also draws attention to the distortions of colonial modernity. So in a way it is a feat that Meenakshi Mukherjee achieves to trying to situate the historicity of India novel away from only the (()) (11:52) of colonial modernity but Dilip Menon, Gauri Viswanathan, Ajanta Sircar, critics like them they go a step further.

And they also engage with the distorted ways in which colonial modernity had been theorized, that distorted ways in which colonial modernity was being talked about. So having said that though we have to be attentive, alert to the re-readings that even Mukherjee's work is possible of, the re-readings that you know we have to undertake of Mukherjee's works if he were to you know analyse Indian fiction in English.

There are certain significances associated with the frameworks that Mukherjee gives us. She tells us how to analyse Indian fiction as a colonial as well as native product.

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Significance of Mukherjee's postulations and frameworks

- ◊ How to analyse Indian fiction as a colonial as well as native product - to be attentive to the difficulties, challenges - eg: modernity, western tradition, native worldviews
- ◊ The historicity of the genre - locating a particular literary tradition
- ◊ Setting up yardsticks for reading and evaluation
- ◊ 'secular' criticism - ignoring religion, caste
- ◊ Focus on 'literary' prose

And she also encourages us to be attentive to the difficulties and challenges inherit for example these are the difficulties that she talks about, how to make sense of modernity, western tradition, native worldviews and how to process all of them together in this new form of narrative which is available to us. How to you know engage with the internal difficulties that one have as well as the external ways in which one is dealing with it.

So I reiterate one of the important things that Meenakshi Mukherjee does is to situate the historicity of the journal and also locate a particular literary tradition. This term is very important, if you recall them any discussions that you had in the context of the think of the range of other courses that you had done.

There is always a literary tradition in place, but this being in the sense that you know there is a way in which you talk about particular authors either in terms of how they continue the literary tradition, how all they you know how they depart from the literary tradition, that is how you know we even demarcate different literary ages, but here apparently when we look at Indian writing in English it is just like one seamless see.

It is difficult to see you know where the demarcations are particularly in the earlier phases when you talk about it all looks as if it is all different byproducts of the colonial modernity. So what Meenakshi Mukherjee does is she tells us how you know you can trace a particular literary tradition even in that. So those initial moments of you know, those initial moves which are important both for literary history as well as for you know for developing a critical enterprise both of these things have been done through Meenakshi Mukherjee's works.

And she is also giving up this is very important, she is setting up yardsticks for reading and evaluation which is why even today when we look at certain kinds of work we just begin to wonder whether this is like purely based on certain kinds of experiences, is it secular enough to be included, are there certain difficulties if you include this kind of writing will it totally beat the purposes of modernity, will it totally beat the purposes of say the new kind of prose that we are being used with.

Maybe from this yardstick looking at literature, particularly Indian fiction in English from this kind of a yardstick also you know when we talk about particular text, the ways in which certain kinds of writers have always been privileged over the others. Maybe that is the time when you also have to revisit some of Mukherjee's postulations and see whether those yardsticks worked in you know particular ways in exclusion, in inclusion.

For example, when she talks about the importance of secular criticism it also means ignoring the aspect of religion and caste. It is I am not saying that is very say deliberate thing that she is doing maybe this happens inadvertently as a result of employing certain kinds of critical

practices, but our task is also to be alert to how it works unknowingly or inadvertently and this focus on the literary prose.

For this you know we cannot really say it is all Meenakshi Mukherjee's falls even otherwise certain kinds of assumptions are there about what is literature and what is not, and if you look at Indian writing in English, Indian fiction particularly that has been very little experiment except why by way of you know certain ways in which Rushdie has employed language or there is one novel inverse, which is that one?

There is a novel written inverse by one of the leading Indian English writers, **“Professor - student conversation starts”** yeah that is also one of the recent ones, very well acclaimed novel written inverse, find it. **“Professor - student conversation ends”** So have been very little experiments on that account because there is a set way in which the literary has been evaluated, the literary has been understood.

And there are also again you can see except for these exceptions whoever has dare to experiment in some form or the other, they have either not really made it to the canon or they have suffered you know heavily in the hands of the market. So that aside this is the other essay that again you know Meenakshi Mukherjee had written, this was the part of the literary history that Mehrotra had brought out.

So this is again not to say that you know Meenakshi Mukherjee needs to be blamed for everything that went wrong with Indian writing in English. She is very, very important in you know in beginning such an enterprise and when she started talking about Indian fiction nobody was talking about Indian fiction. When she first did her dissertation on Indian fiction in English that was not even seen as a body of writing that could be accessed scholarly.

It was just you know some sort of writing which existed and Sahitya Academy had just begun to acknowledge that that kind of writing by giving awards to Indian English writers as well, but beyond that it was not seen as a body of writing which befitted any kind of scholarly attention.

She was the one who radically changed that, but now we know that if you take the kind of literary productions in our country and the secondary material which is produced alongside,

Indian English fiction perhaps you know, it ranks the highest in that sense, in terms of turning out material, if you look at you know number of conferences which are being held where Indian fiction in English gets talked about.

So everything has changed radically in a very short span of time from the time she started writing which is from the 70s onwards. Of course you know in the 80s the market forces also aided, but if you look at it from a purely literary critical perspective, her role is tremendous and for in fact you know I am not even exaggerating, when I tell you that if you want to undertake a survey of Indian fiction in English it is difficult not to encounter Meenakshi Mukherjee every now and then.

No matter how you do your search it will all you know narrow down into either her Realism and Reality or her collection of The Perishable Empire or in those you know essays that she published individually in different forums.

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Beginnings of the Indian Novel

- o 1930s as the take-off decade for the Indian novel in English
- o The genealogy - traced to the previous century
- o Produced from metropolitan centres and small towns
- o The 'eagerness' in the titles
- o 'suffered' from an uncertainty about audience
- o Different dates for the 'first Indian novel'

The sense of an audience - the most radical difference

And when she talks about the beginning of the Indian novel in fact she is actually focusing on Indian novel in English and like a many others who came after her, before her, 1930s is acknowledged as a decade, the takeoff decade for Indian novel in English and what was particularly important of the 1930s, if you think about the Indian history.

“Professor - student conversation starts” Indians please respond, yeah specific things, other than that 1930s, nationalist movement, yeah, nationalist movement and Gandhi arrives, the nationalist movement except very different input all together from the end of 1920s,

1930s and 1940s what happens, what happened in 1947? Yeah, such a laughable thing happened yeah, okay. **“Professor - student conversation ends”**

So in the 1930s in fact is very, very important for the Indian history and when we start talking about the Indian writing in English in general again you know 1930s is seen as a takeoff decade. There is a problem in situating 1930s as the takeoff decade because we also have an mental image of 1930s becoming the starting point and we also tend to you know ignore and marginalize all those efforts, all those literary efforts which came prior to that moment.

And again though Meenakshi Mukherjee she does a very fantastic job of you know tracing the historic trajectory and intellectual traditions which were part of Indian novel from the 1930s onwards, she also takes us back to the previous century, but we know that right from the beginning her objective is to show that 1930s is the takeoff moment. There have many things happened. She tells us there are many things which happened.

She says you know the genealogy can be traced to the previous century and she also gives a detailed account of many text we perhaps she herself on earth for the first time because many text had gone out of print, she talks about the difficulty in accessing them, but regardless of all of that she comes back to this point that yes all of those things are there but 1930s is very important.

If you again look at the way this course is structured, yeah, we begin our actual discussion only with Kanthapura, regardless of the history which is over there, because that is the way canonically it has been structured, many things may have happened prior to that moment, but we begin with Gandhi, we begin with Kanthapura, we begin with how the Indian fiction response to the nationalist movement in particular ways.

And the 2 novels that we talk about in between from the 19th century Kailash Chunder Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt those are about imaginary insurrections. So unless you have a dialogue with the you know colonial power, unless you have a story to tell which also runs parallel to the political mode of the nation, it is not you know it is not worth telling.

Meenakshi Mukherjee also talks about a number of other text as well, but they are clearly the other text. Many of them are not available, some of them are, there is absolutely no kind of

scholarly attention which has been paid on them, we would shortly see as well, and she talks about how in the I mean, from the beginning, novels were produced from both Metropolitan centres and small towns and she draws her attention to the specific kind of titles that those novels had.

She talks about the eagerness in those titles and she also talks about this thing that how they all, the early writers in English they suffered from an uncertainty about an audience and she also says at later point in her work that this sense of an audience makes a radical difference between the earlier writers and the writers in the contemporary, that the contemporary writers are more sure of their audience.

It is again you know a debatable thing about how to locate your readership and whether one can ever be sure of the kind of readership when you are sending out your work to a global audience and she talks about these different debates and contestations you know the vernacular traditions with you know she talks about these different traditions of buying for the first prize, you know which is the first novel in, the first novel ever written in India.

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The slide features a title 'The trajectory' in a large, dark serif font. Below the title is a list of five bullet points, each starting with a red circle containing a white slash. The text of the bullet points is as follows: 'Kylas Chunder Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt - 1835, 1845 - project into the future', 'Pre-novel narrative era - no generic expectation, no overt dependence on canonical literary texts, not weighed down by abject servility', 'Political radicalism of a 'simplistic variety'', 'Lal Behari Day', and 'Krupabai Satthianadhan'. To the right of the list is a red rectangular box with white text that reads 'To dispel the general amnesia about these predecessors'. The slide is framed by a thick black horizontal bar at the top and bottom.

The trajectory

- o Kylas Chunder Dutt and Shoshee Chunder Dutt - 1835, 1845 - project into the future
- o Pre-novel narrative era - no generic expectation, no overt dependence on canonical literary texts, not weighed down by abject servility
- o Political radicalism of a 'simplistic variety'
- o Lal Behari Day
- o Krupabai Satthianadhan

To dispel the general amnesia about these predecessors

So those sort of contestations are there and when she begins to particularly trace the trajectory, she says the objective is to dispel the general amnesia about these predecessors and more than that you know she does not you know and this comes towards the end of the essay in fact when she talks about the general amnesia about these predecessors.

Her task is not to say that, the novels which came in the previous century were superior to the ones which were produced in the 1930s, but to show that we should not pretend that there was no novel at all. She is not trying to privilege them over the other kinds of writings available in the post 1930s in anyway and she also just like we have noticed with Mehrotra's introduction and also the brief discussion in the other work she also talks about these 2 are pre-novel narratives which came out in 1835 and 1845.

Those are about imaginary insurrections based on a projected future where the British also are forced to you know say move away from their colonial enterprise and in this pre-novel narrative era she talks about you know how there are no generic expectations, there is no overt dependence on any canonical literary text from the west, you know. We do not see these early writers imitating them blindly.

And she also says they are not weighed on by object servility. So those points she just glosses over, but they are very important in the sense that right from the beginning it was not as if though all of these novelistic traditions where an offshoot of colonial modernity, it did begin with the sense of servility or with the sense of blind imitation and she talks about how those works were also politically radical, but she says that radicalism was of a simplistic variety.

So later when we talk about the politics which is part of India fiction in English maybe we would also begin to see that any kind of apprising which was you know which came into being before 1857, what happened in 1857? **“Professor - student conversation starts”** (()) (25:40) or whatever is known as the first war of independence, the first struggle for independence that happened in 1857 **“Professor - student conversation ends”**

And usually we see that there is a tendency to see whatever happened before 1857 as you know has some kind of a politics of some kind of a radicalism of a simplistic variety and again whatever happened before the 1930s or before Indian National Congress was you know officially formed that is the end of the 19th Century, yeah, we begin to see that those sort of movements even the politically consolidated movements prior to the formation of Indian National Congress, prior to the arrival of Gandhi, prior to the 1857 revolts.

Those are not seen as organized revolts, those are not like taken very seriously. In after drawing your attention to subaltern studies I hope you must have heard of this term in the

context of post-coloniality. The one of the most important objective of the subaltern historians is to take her attention away from this dominant nationalist historiography.

Drawing her attention to the many kinds of insurrections, revolts, the peasant revolts which were all part of India's you know struggle for freedom which were not always associated with the Indian National Congress which were not organised, mobilize by Gandhi or such similar figures. So here we find a way in which Meenakshi Mukherjee and all the other dominant critics, they are trending a path which runs parallel to the nationalist historiography.

Which is why when some of the, even Rushdie when he begins to talk about moving away from the dominant story of the nation. We know that he strays only to a certain point, again there is a limit to the ways in which he strays and many others you know particularly the Dalit historians and the feminist historians, they all had a problem with the kind of alternatives which were available even when one was retelling the story.

Because the dominant mode, the dominant acceptable mode was the nationalist way of talking about history, the nationalist way about talking about politics and that said, she draws our attention to these 2 figures as well Lal Behari Day and Krupabai Sathianadhan. Krupabai Sathianadhan is one of the earliest women writers and Meenakshi Mukherjee has also worked extensively on her.

And she very briefly draws her attention to how some of these writers were fluent in writing in English and A.Madhavaiah is the writer who wrote in both in Tamil and in English.

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The flaunting of subjection

o “With kind treatment the Indian will remain a British subject for years to come. For the matter of that, he will remain so probably after any treatment; but he will show pleasure and pride in being so, if treated kindly”

From *Thillai Govindan* (1908) by A.Madhavaiah

And how they also flaunted the kind of you know subjection that they felt under the British rule and this is what she writes, “with kind treatment the Indian will remain a British subject for years to come. For the matter of that he will remain so probably after any treatment, but he will show pleasure and pride in being so, if treated kindly”

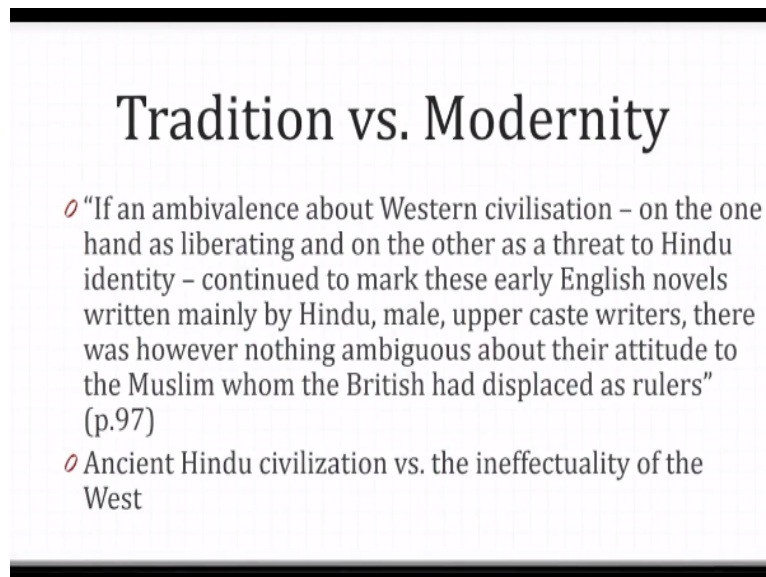
So we also find she also you know talks about A. Madhavaiah as a representative of this kind of an attitude who are you know happy to be under a benevolent colonial rule and this is not something that we can isolate and talk about because if you remember the rhetoric used in Srinivasa Iyengar’s work that was also you know a kind of pleasure and pride in the benevolent aspect of colonialism.

So we also see another paradox over here. If you go back to the other slide here she talks about the earlier works, there is no dependence on canonical literary texts, not weighed on by abject servility, maybe in their novelistic narrative enterprises that is not very evident. They are willing to move away as a different literary tradition altogether, but when it comes to the kind of politics that they foreground, the kind of politics that they accept here maybe there is a sense of pleasure and pride.

Because you know I have not read through any of the works that Meenakshi Mukherjee talks about. She is maybe we can say that she does not give a number of details to prove this point but we cannot say this is an entirely an isolated point because we do find corollaries and certain other writings and writers as well. Mostly this essay talks about a number of details related to the text produced before 1930s in the previous century.

And the other major theme in this that she talks about is that this the ambivalence between tradition and modernity and in her own words if an ambivalence about western civilization on the one hand is liberating.

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Tradition vs. Modernity

- o "If an ambivalence about Western civilisation – on the one hand as liberating and on the other as a threat to Hindu identity – continued to mark these early English novels written mainly by Hindu, male, upper caste writers, there was however nothing ambiguous about their attitude to the Muslim whom the British had displaced as rulers" (p.97)
- o Ancient Hindu civilization vs. the ineffectuality of the West

And on the other as a threat to Hindu identity continue to mark these early English novels written mainly by Hindu male upper caste writers that is seen as a very incidental thing over here, which gets problematized in later when Ajanta Sircar, Gauri Viswanathan and they all started talking about it. There was however nothing ambiguous about their attitude to the Muslim, whom the British had displaced as rulers.

So we begin to see different kinds of politics at work it is not that these Indian English writers where only anti-colonial, they were also certain other internal kinds of disputes seeing it is not about seeing only the British or the British the colonial enterprises as the enemy figure. It was also about locating another in terms of religion, in terms of caste and she here you know she makes this incidental reference to how most of these writers very Hindu male upper caste writers.

But the radical opposition is drawn say only between Hindu and Muslim. Gender and caste are seen as incidental categories over here. They just happened to be male, they just happened to be upper caste, but the same sort of other figure, if not an enemy figure, the same sort of another figure perhaps can be located in the female subject, in women as well as in the other caste, other caste which are lower in terms of hierarchy.

So these things Indian not just the critical enterprise even Indian fiction in English in general, it was not alert to many of these things for a very, very long time. Even today you know when we talk about caste and one of you if you would like to do a presentation on caste in Indian English Novel. Suddenly you realise that you really do not have a choice, you have to either talk about untouchable or then you come back and talk about Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things.

It is as if you can talk about caste only if there is a lower caste figure. Those are the only discussions which the space of Indian fiction in English had been allowing. It is not as if caste is otherwise entirely absent. In Kanthapura there is a predominant presence of the upper caste politics, the upper caste tradition, the upper caste ethos, but that is not seen as caste, that is an incidental presence, that is part of tradition, that is part of the nation.

But you can talk about caste if the caste does not have any of those secular markers, it is difficult to talk about caste all the more difficult in this pace because it uses the language of modernity, it is written in English. English is the modern language; it is the space that modernity inhabits so powerfully. So from where can all of these elements of religion and caste can come.

So these are again certain questions which the earlier critical tradition of Indian writing in English had refused to deal with. I am not saying now the scene is entirely different, but at least there are handful of people who are drawing our attention to these many ambivalences which are present and she also talks about how many of these writers felt that the Hindu civilization can be projected as a superior one as opposed to be ineffectuality of the west.

And thus she does not really press this point much, but one can always you know assume that this sort of attitude was very prevalent because it was also going parallel, it was also you know in tandem with the anti-colonial agenda that nationalist movement had. Then talking about the writers in English and other languages, she again you know comes to this point which has been reiterated in various other faces by Meenakshi Mukherjee herself.

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Writers in English and other languages

- Products of the same educational system
 - Macaulay's Minutes
- IE writers – displayed their acquaintance with the classics of Western literature more obviously than others
- Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya's *Rajmohan's Wife*
 - Shifted from English to Bengali
- Lal Behari Day

That writers who are writing in English as well as in the other languages both were products of the same educational system and the only difference was that the Indian English writers they sort of you know displayed their knowledge of the western literature more obviously than the others and she particularly talks about this case of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay who wrote the first English novel *Rajmohan's wife*.

But after that he never wrote again in English for the reasons of you know nationalist fervour, related to questions of nationalist loyalty and all he shifts from Bengali to English and she also tells us about the need to ask questions related to this choice more pertinently in the contemporary and briefly talks about you know Lal Bihari Day as well one of the earlier writers.

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Where are the women?

- Krupabai Sattianadhan (1862-'94)
 - Daughter of Brahman scholar who converted to Christianity
- *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1894)
- *Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life* (posthumous 1895)
 - Largely autobiographical
- Reprinted only in 1998

Not mere archival
interest

And if you still have not asked this question about you know where are the women in all of these discussions. Given that in the nationalist movement also spoke about you know the women in various ways. It was not as if you know Gandhian politics did not address women. It is a different thing whether he addressed women and Dalits in a different political framework altogether, but it was not as if women were entirely absent.

A lot of reform movements were taking place; women were always part of the nationalist project as well. They also wanted to you know talk about women's education so on and so forth, but when we talk about the history of Indian writing in English there is a very conspicuous absence of women. Even if you talk about the contemporary women writers maybe occasionally there are certain writers that you can flag and show.

There is one Arundhati Roy, one Kiran Desai other than that we do not find a formidable presence of a set of women writers just like you know we can talk about the (()) (35:54) of the 1930s or the Rushdie's and (()) (35:59) of the contemporary. So which is why she talks about Krupabai Sattianandhan and talks about this writer who left from 1862 to 1894 and she tells us that you know the interest in Krupabai Sattianandhan is not merely of an archival interest.

We also need to engage with her work for knowing you know what kind of presence gender had, how gender was also a part of all of these discussions and these were the 2 major works that she published, in 1894 *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* and in 1895, that was after her death, *Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life*, was published. The second one was considered largely autobiographical which also entails that you know she belong to a family of converts.

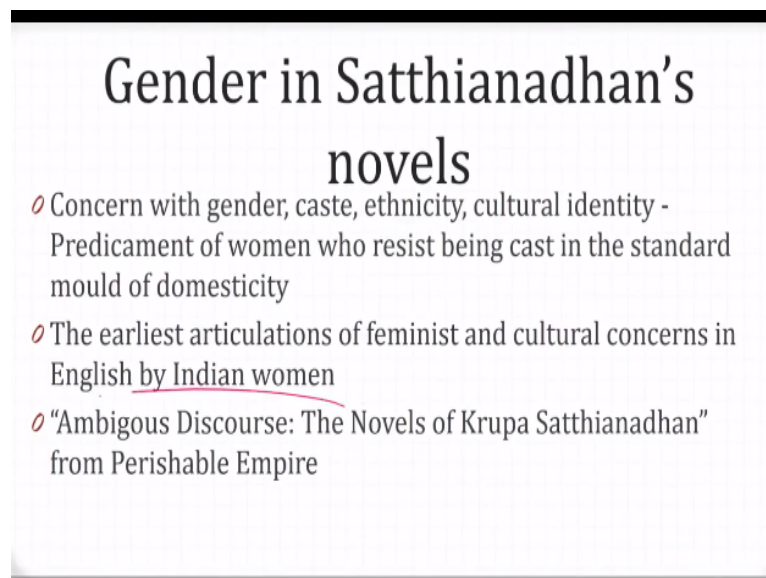
And her work was reprinted only in 1998, so it is no surprise that no considerable scholarly attention was given to her work and 1998 is very late moment to talk about you know many things that happened in the previous century and this is also the time 1990s is also the time when renewed interest is being given to a women writers.

There is lot of work which goes on to as part of you know literary history to dig up old writers and talk about them if you are aware of you know the entire set of you know works that Susie Tharu brought out, *Women Writing India* an entire volume of women writers from

starting from 600 BC onwards, all of those moments are big moments in India's literary history happens in the 1990s.

Maybe this is also a part of that ongoing movement which was gaining momentum. She very briefly talks about the gender in Krupa Sattianandhan's novels.

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Gender in Sattianadhan's novels

- o Concern with gender, caste, ethnicity, cultural identity - Predicament of women who resist being cast in the standard mould of domesticity
- o The earliest articulations of feminist and cultural concerns in English by Indian women
- o "Ambiguous Discourse: The Novels of Krupa Sattianadhan" from *Perishable Empire*

And there is also an entire essay that she wrote in *Perishable Empire*, Meenakshi Mukherjee; *Ambiguous Discourse: The Novels of Krupa Sattianandhan*, which is also part of your course material. She says that these works are of supreme importance, but even today we do not find much of a scholarly attention or much of canonical interest in Krupa Sattianandhan's novels.

Her novel is concerned with many things that the novels of those times were not talking about gender, caste, ethnicity, cultural identity and also very importantly the predicament of women who resisted being cast in the standard mould of domesticity. Her life was also you know very radical in that sense and Meenakshi Mukherjee feels maybe in her we can also find the earliest articulations, a feminist and cultural concerns in English by Indian women.

But apart from these very brief discussions we do not get to know more about Krupa Sattianandhan's work in any of the other writers works and some of the things that she talks about her novels in this essay, *Ambiguous Discourse*.

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Against the grain

- o "She does not fit the assumptions of patriarchy that women should be either passive objects of pleasure and convenience or creatures intriguing for domestic power"
- o Implicit debates about the relationship between Christianity and Indian nationalism
- o "suggesting different ways of reading which may not be neatly confined in the simple binary grid of tradition/modernity or individualism/collective identity - the grids through which nineteenth-century India has generally been studied"

She does not fit the assumptions of patriarchy that women should be either passive objects of pressure and convenience or creatures intriguing for domestic power and her work was also different in the sense that it explodes the debates which were inherent in the relationship between Christianity and Indian nationalism because otherwise most of the discussions were about the traditional Hinduism, the traditional practices which were inherent to India and the Western penetrations of modernity.

So here is one writer, that too a woman talking about the ambiguous relationship between Christianity and Indian nationalism and again going to Meenakshi Mukherjee's words. Her work suggested different ways of reading which may not be neatly confined in the simple binary grid of tradition/modernity or individualism/collective identity, the grids through which 19th century India has generally been studied.

At some level even if you look at the works of the 20th century, these binaries are still there, so when we talk about the early nationalist phase and the writings which came out during that time the writings of 1930s and 40s, there is a tendency to again fit the discussion into this grid of tradition/modernity or like you know the individualism/collective identity debate which is going on.

So like Meenakshi Mukherjee says it is not something which could be relegated to the previous century to the 19th century, but the critical imports of that, it continued to live on in certain ways. So what are the implications of these kinds of writing she sums up with that.

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The implications

- o "The tentativeness of nineteenth-century novelists not only about writing in an acquired colonial language but also about their readership has been replaced by an overwhelming confidence among postcolonial writers that the English language belongs to them as much as to anyone else; a text written in global language has potentially a global constituency, and therefore, as a corollary, a national one too." (102)

The tentativeness of the 19th century novelists not only about writing in acquired colonial language, but also about their readership has been replaced by an overwhelming confidence among postcolonial writers that the English language belongs to them as much as to anyone else; a text written in global language has potentially a global constituency, and therefore, as a corollary, a national one too.

So here you know she is also making a statement which would help us to see the ways in which Indian fiction has evolved given the limited ways in which it emerged in the previous century. Now there is a wider readership and there is also a way in which more confidence is there in their writing and this has become both the global as well as national site and she ends by talking about these you know the aspect of switching languages.

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Switching languages

- o "It is worth analysing the complex circumstances that made Bankimchandra shift from English to his Bengali mother tongue before he could gain national recognition as a writer, while at the end of the twentieth century one would expect the process to be reversed" (p.102)

Literary issues - informed
by cultural politics and
market forces

And how we need to enter into those debates with draws attention to this context where Bankimchandra had to shift from English to his Bengali mother tongue and she says those complex circumstances which led a writer to switch to a different language in order to you know one was for his own personal convention and secondly to attain a certain recognition as a national writer.

So he had to switch the languages, what did it really entail and in the 20th century the process is somewhat reverse. In order to get attention as a national writer because you know again in the previous session we very briefly mentioned about Aijaz Ahmed who said that every national document their document gets national attention or a national statue only when it is published in English.

Because English has been become the official language, English has become the language of authority, a language of legitimation. So the reverse process Meenakshi Mukherjee says has happened from 19th to the 20th century and one would expect you know many writers wanting to write in English to get that kind of recognition and you know that kind of wider audience.

And she says using this example that it is important to look at not just literally issues but to look at how it is all informed by cultural politics and market forces. So this is something that I want you end with. In many discussions even the canonical dominant discussions about Indian writing in English, Indian fiction particularly you would see that there is very limited sort of a kind of works which have come out looking at only at the literary aspects, looking only at the stylistic aspects.

A lot of works have you the secondary material on the existing works it talks about the cultural politics as well as the market forces. So it is not a new thing in Indian writing in English you know to talk about the literary, the cultural and the political, the market forces all of those together, because this is how right from the time the discussions about Indian writing in English emerged, it was not about the narrative aspect.

It was not about you know the aspects of the text what kind of language was used; what kind of techniques were used. So those things even you know even in the extensive discussions that Meenakshi Mukherjee had we had not really you know invited to pay attention to the

aspects of journal, the aspects of techniques, the stylistic devices we used, we are in fact a time and again drawn to these aspects of cultural politics, how the market forces are at work, how say the nationalist versus the colonial gets projected so on and so forth.

So this sort of a tendency you would see continually maybe occasionally you would find certain kinds of work drawing attention to the way Rushdie uses language or Arundhati Roy uses language, but that is also seen as a postcolonial tool to speak back to the empire. So to sum up it would not be wrong to say that Meenakshi Mukherjee had laid the foundations of the critical approaches towards Indian fiction in English.

But nevertheless there are also the others who have shown the ways in which you can depart from those. So when you make presentations also see if you do not have to always make a reference to Meenakshi Mukherjee, but see how Mukherjee or the other dominant historians or the critics have already given you a framework within which you can talk about those works and how important it becomes to move away and how impossible also it becomes to move away in order to produce a new kind of reading altogether.

But nevertheless you know what I want you to keep in mind is that the framework that now we take for granted to talk about the tradition of hidden fiction in English or the you know the intellectual trajectory of Indian fiction in English that was there were certain pioneers who had to painstakingly undertake this task and there is another book by Meenakshi Mukherjee *Twice Born Fiction*, there she in the preface she talks about the difficulties that she faced in the beginning when she wanted to work on this body of writing Indian fiction in English,

There were people like wondering what is there to be done on Indian fiction in English, can any kind of scholarly work be undertaken on that sort of writing and in the 1970s in fact they were many who even thought that by the end of the 1970s one would also see the death knell of Indian fiction in English, but quite the reverse happened with the 1980s and *Midnight's Children* and Rushdie happened, that is another story altogether.

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Next session

- Rajmohan's Wife: The First Indian English Novel
 - From Perishable Empire, Meenakshi Mukherjee
 - P.30-49
- Introduction to the novel by Meenakshi Mukherjee
- Preface by Brajendra Nath Banerji

So in the next session this is again you know before we move on to the presentations with Kanthapura from next week, please read through Rajmohan's Wife, the introduction that Meenakshi Mukherjee gives to the novel just about 2 pages there is a preface by Brajendra Nath Banerji, also please find out who Brajendra Nath Banerji is, that is a one-page preface that he gives.

And a short essay from Perishable Empire, again which Meenakshi Mukherjee writes so lot of the critical interventions that we have with respect to Rajmohan's Wife and it is from Meenakshi Mukherjee and you will also find it very little scholarly attention has been invested on this work. If you want to take a look at the novel very briefly, you can borrow it from me.

You will also see it does not really you know comply to any of our expectations of novel, it was serialised initially, then it became a novel. You would find it at times you know too long drawn and you know with lot of descriptions, so but if you want to take a look at it to see how the fiction was written during that time and again when he starts writing his Bengali novels, it is in a very different way altogether. So please do read through these works at least the introduction by Meenakshi Mukherjee. So that is all for today.