Understanding Creativity and Creative Writing Prof. Neelima Talwar Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian institute of Technology, Bombay

Lecture - 12 Creative, Cultural Space for Students

This lecture is titled creative cultural space for students. The aim of this lecture is to help you examine your college life by providing concepts and reading material that can aid this process. So, this really again takes our discussion about authenticity to another level I would say, because I think we can also begin to see all these ideas and contextualization that we have undertaken earlier the various connotations of words that we have undertaken earlier. I think we can take it to another level.

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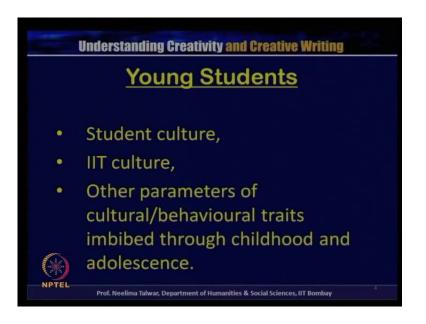


And this is what I would try to do in terms of my focus on youth today on young people like you. So, we would sort of start with Erikson's observation about the quest for identity as the hallmark of early youth. This is hallmark of early youth is determined by the quest for identity and often it ends up with certain amount of contestation with existing social order. So, we would keep that in mind and what I would also like to do is to talk about the institutional systems within which you operate because they are multilayered, and therefore, they provide enormous amount of opportunity for growth for change and I think change is the keyword here. So, the word quest for identity or the quest for meaning and the quest also for alterations in the social order I think this is what the institutional framework in terms of higher education it provides that opportunity. So, it is multilayered in that sense and what I would also like to do is to introduce another concept contained in the term liminal. Now that word actually refers to transitional phase in between phase and in that sense, the framework institutional framework that we are talking about is really transitional sort of sphere but also as I said this is a sphere that is full of opportunity.

So, let us see how that term liminal can add to our understanding and I think this is a word I would like you to retain, because I think many of these words they will begin to have meaning for you and it will keep growing within you. This is that kind of word with it is a important, very important word, so keep that in mind. And of course, at a very simple level, it is quite evident that when we talk about institutional life, let us say of a residential institution like the IIT or any other residential university or university in universities in general we are talking about you know academics as well as the social structure. In which all of us exists specially those who are involved in academic. So, I am actually keeping the model of residential universities in mind, but it has general ramifications.

So, let us say you spend your time between academics which is very structured activity; hostel life, where you are unfettered, relatively speaking and of course, then you have a third dimension in terms of your opportunities. There are whole range of youth festivals that actually keep every institution very very active and highly energized. Now in terms of student culture, I would again draw your attention to the word culture that we had used in the way in the sense Raymond Williams talked about its complexity. And of course, what I would like to point out that one of its meanings is related to the way we lead our lives. You know, it shows cultural patterns in terms of how we lead our lives.

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So, the point is, is there something called student culture. What does it mean when we use the word student culture? Is there something called IIT culture, we are talking about a specific institution like IIT. And as I said please keep it in mind, the whole idea is to enlarge the discussion, but right now it is focused on IIT culture. So, is student IIT culture, the same as IIT culture in general these are questions of interpretation and once you began to examinant through your experience and your understanding, you will began to see the complexity of arriving at consensus. Each one of you may define the IIT culture or the student culture in IIT in different ways. But therefore, you know we will keep all that complexity in mind, and also the fact that when you come here you also bring your other cultural trades, you know from your family, from your city, from the region to which you belong.

But all of these actually all of these began to regain new blends, new life when you come within the liminal space of an institution. So, I am trying to draw your attention to the processes that are interwoven within the system and again it is always very loosely defined, it is very very loosely defined. Just as your lives at also in that sense not completely controlled by ideas which may have did not into you right from childhood or from schooling pattern or from coaching classes or whatever.

Now the point is when we talk about the opportunities to explore various possibilities once you are within an institutional frame work which is a very very a privilege position no doubt, because institutions of higher learning your access to these is dependent on so many social economic cultural factors and so that is a very very privilege position. However, it is a really a position which when we begin to examinant from the point of you of young people it is full of contradictions also.

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So, let us say on the one hand, we would acknowledge all the positive elements of being in an institution with possibilities where those who have the initiative in the drive, they are able to explore these opportunities. So, let us say what are these opportunities in addition to academic specialization that is also huge privilege to be able to choose and learn and to own one skill, and then from this in between state enter another level of occasional existence where you contribute much more directly and actively to the social frame work.

The other opportunity is in terms of doing innovative projects like the human powered car, the cell phones cycle charger to the Indian humor site and I am only mentioning a few. And you would you know find many many things that young people who have the initiative drive and are able to make use of the given opportunity they are using that. But the and also then there are these whole set of cultural festivals which are very popular in IIT and I will show you one or two clips just to give you some idea of the high level of energy that is generated. For example, during paff like performing arts festival where both the performers in the audience, they are completely involved in creating these

artistic adventures. Then there is mood indigo where students from different parts of the country. They come to the institution and they participate in various activity. So, that is also again a very very energizing activity

And then there is the tech fest which is in as the name itself suggest which is highly technologically oriented and it has also gained great momentum. So, there is a surge of these very positive acts of celebration, and therefore, one would definitely not undermined them and one would also an you know really feel one would like to say that its really something that shows the strength of any institution and also of young people and their desire to do something new original and also entertaining.

But the there are questions about these festivals and about the success rates of institutions that we often talk about they have their own relevance, but I have a few questions I like to pose before you.

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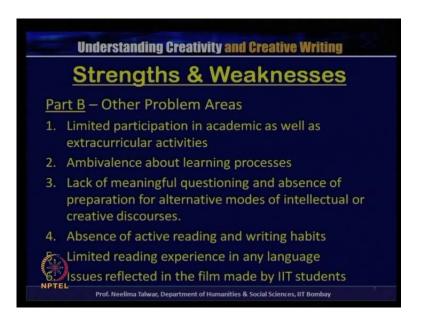


Now, these kinds of festivals are they Carnivalesque or are these acts of consolidation of a highly competitive, I would say value system now just an educational system. The word Carnivalesque comes from Bakhtin and actually may be I should just read out this particular statement from Bakhtin way and we have talked about Bakhtin earlier also when we talked about affection. So, this is critic the Russian critic who really has a contributed to thought about literary and cultural spaces in a very very significant way. And so, according to him carnival, you know the fact of celebrations and carnivals these a kind these lead to temporary suspension of hierarchy's. So, I will read this statement from his book the (()) and his world; he says the it the temporary suspension both ideal and real of hierarchical rank creative during carnival time is a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. So, on the one hand there is great surge of joy, excitement, youthful energy, during these festivals, and during all these new things that people are able to do within the academic sphere or you know extensions of these.

But at the same time is there any kind of questioning of why everybody else is not part of this story or does it all mainly show that those who compete and succeed they are the ones whose voice will reach everywhere. Now on the one hand I really do not want to get into it in terms of critiquing it from outside, I am interested in showing you the critics of students themselves from within. I have many many samples of these, but I think I would restrict myself to those that are already in the public sphere.

So, the question therefore, the next question is related to the fact that these are not necessarily collective celebrations, therefore, their their show that only there is a kind of divide. So, these are the strengths and problems that we are interested in talking about because we are in search of authenticity and also educationally if we want to bring about changes it is important to be authentic. So, now in terms of these other problem areas, let me quickly enumerate them and these are not inventories of grief sort of say, but these are inventories of hope because I think by acknowledging them one can overcome the difficulties.

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First of all, I would say that there is very limited participation in academic as well as extracurricular activities even within a system like the IIT this also fare amount of ambivalence about the learning process these also lack of meaningful questioning in absence of preparation for alternative modes of intellectual or creative discourse us. So, let us say if a particular part does not work for students instead of really questioning it instead of critiquing it and also oh instead of finding out the necessary vocabulary the necessary skills and ideas that help on find strengths in other directions

I think they sort of become a bit passive about it. So, there is a lot of passivity in terms of these question that come to everybody's minds specially when they are you know young and full of hope. But at the same time there is no effort towards finding alternatives modes of a discourse, there is also great deal of increasing absence of active reading and writing habits and that may seem like a very traditional out look. But you say I do feel that it could be possible to rule out the significance of reading as a mode of slow process of reflection, which is important for every mind to grow. And therefore, this absence of active reading and writing habits and writing habits amongst young people who have come for higher education is a source of great worry to all of us. I think then there is also another growing issue it seems like a long list, but it is a important to talk about it so.

There is very limited reading experience in any language. So, let us say if you do not read in English it is not necessary that you read in your mother tongue I have shared these bilingual exercises with you and I think that it was quite clear that many of the students actually a struggling with even the reading habit. So, this is again something that is you know that needs to be looked at and finally, I think what I would do is to place this from the point of view of students who have written about failure within the IIT system. So, two things are happening here in terms of what I wish to place before you; one is of course, this liminality, the other thing is about the complex interview woven pattern of cultural. You know issues of values that I have been incorporated by each one of you, and also therefore, success, but also looking at it from the point of view of failure.

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Now, I am not sure if you know about this film, but there is a film called déjà vu which means that you know it, it is something which is already seen. Now you can dip into this film, but primarily what Anshul Singhal who was interested in theater activities after coming to IIT. And started directing plays he decided to make this film which is triggered by a suicide committed by one of his classmates and he felt very deeply affected by the sense of failure that the student felt because he could not get into a particular branch of engineering.

And so it triggered a whole set of these artistic activities where he try to crystallize the sense of what happens to students when they come into a system with again a baggage from their childhood of being pressured into doing certain kind of academic work and when they fail what kind of deep sense of failure this could be. So, you can dip into this film.

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I sort of decided that while talking about this issue I will introduce you to Bildungsroman a form of fiction which is actually completely devoted to the quest theme this developed in Germany. And of course, in its earlier form, it develop from the quest theme in folk tales in terms of its first remarkable milestone which is the apparent ship of William mister is always mentioned as the novel that started of the this trend. And what it does it to actually deal with the growth of a particular young person, the protagonist in terms of various kinds of experiences he or she goes through while growing up within institutional surroundings.

I also what I also would like to do here is to place the Bildungsroman in terms of the Indian discourse and therefore, very briefly, but I would say in a way that I hope will reach you I would try to place novels and films that deal with IIT experience before you. So, from these issues that I have articulated earlier of search for authenticity to its expression in well known forms that are already available in the public space. So, I am moving to that direction. So, about Bildungsroman, there are one or two things that perhaps need to be mentioned this a form of fiction which has very close formal connections to biography and memoir and also it is been noted that it lends itself to the cinematic form in a very significant way.

So, you can find in numerable examples of this form from different countries, but I think as I said I would try and focus on the Indian experience there are similar forms of writing the developmental novel the education novel the artist novel and. So, what I would suggest to you is to pick up any one of these in terms of the kind of occasion that you are looking for if you are looking for an artistic occasion look for the artist novel like joys his portrait of the artist as a young man and so on and so forth.

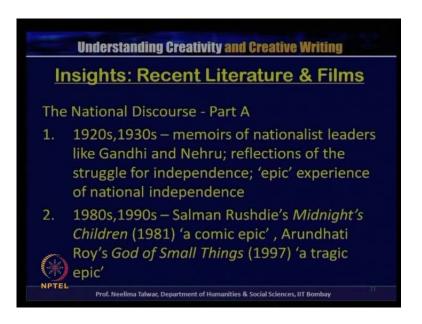
So, this can be a sort of journey of in terms of reading material that is close to your own search that you can undertake. In this module, I am actually trying to build more and more of this reading material for you. May be in the next module, I can I will begin analyze the reading material from the point of you of the writing process, a little more slowly and little more carefully in terms of the methodologies that may be help full, but here the idea is to really widen the scope.

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And therefore, now let me dip in to this (()) and I do also want to mention that in postcolonial writing that is let us say writing after independence. This kind of form has become very important and also for a lot of marginalized people this is a very important form because it helps you look for your experiences and what kind of transformations you want or what kind of suffering you have endured in undergoing the given values of a society. So, now, this sense of ordeal is involved in this form within our own national sphere.

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One would like to mention that in the 1920s and 1930s. Lets say this is not Bildungsroman in the strict sense, but because of his close proximity to memorize and biography. It is important to remember that lot of our nationalist leaders like Gandhiji and Pandit Nehru they of course, wrote about their own personal experience which was deeply connected to the national experience. It was deeply connected to a collective sense of freedom that each one of them was seeking and helping create a sort of say.

So, therefore, these early writings memoir and biographical writing of this period is actually helps us understand the form of bildungsroman that revolves round the IIT system. Because the IIT is were also created as part of the nationalist discourse they were created as institutions of national importance. And therefore, I feel that we should place it within the national discourse for libration and growth the second phase of Bildungsroman.

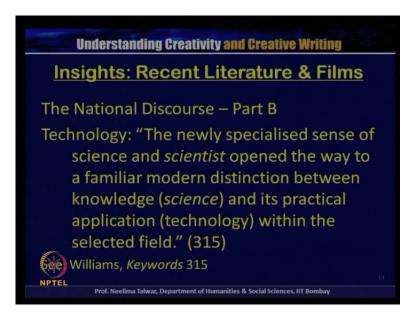
In the Indian context revolves round, Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children, we have already talked about it. And I hope you would spend time reading this great book that was a comic epic as a Rushdie called it, because the epic quality of early nationalist writing it subverted in this phase, because there are lot issues of you know disillusion meant that the writers have dipped into. Salman Rushdie from his position in the diaspora, Indian diaspora and Arunndhati Roy from her routes within the country in god of small things again a beautifully crafted novel, which is a tragic epic. So, I hope you would read both these in terms of Bildungsroman and in terms of therefore, placing the discourse about specific system like IIT within this larger quest of young people for meaning in different kinds of locations and cultural situations.

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While shifting to the IIT novel sort of say while we can use that term or cinema about the IIT system and the educational system, two things need to be clarified. I think apart from just discussion of the institutional details what one has to recognize is that these institution they are brand value and the aspirational value is related to middle class obsession with engineering education in general and the IIT brand name in particular as symbols of monitory. And so social success and in that sense a for economic mobility and for survival middle classes are you know everywhere are driven by the need for survival and mobility's economic mobility.

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The second term before I come to the novel proper is related to the term technology. I would quickly dip into Raymond Williams who said the newly specialized sense of science scientist in terms science as a systematic study of nature open the way to a familiar modern distinction between knowledge that is science and it is practical application that is technology within the selected field. So, technology deals with application within the selected field a third idea. So, middle class obsession to what is technology free what is there for technology education in three this preoccupation with survival now it is true that technology is a mode of survival you know it is an instrument that helps you survive better.

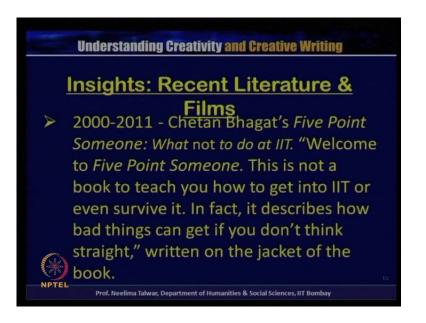
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But let us quickly say you know look at very important study by manual castles the network society who is pointed out that technologically we are in a phase which is in transition. So, from industrial age to information a it is the huge transition and this information age is brought about by communication and biological technologies and of course, you also points out in this very famous book that survival of societies are tide to technological applications.

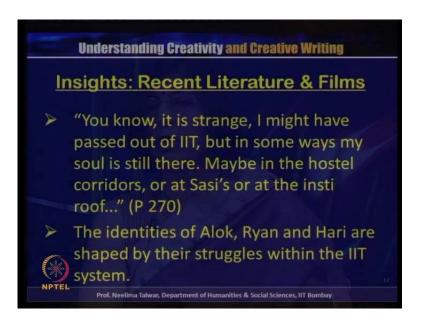
So, middle class survival that it is link to technological education because it is also a mode of survival within this stage of history that we inhabit this we will keep in mind because I feel that we also then have to remember that the discourse about technology within IIT system, they can be a discourse about collective survival. In the way the national is discourse was about collective survival collective liberation. Therefore, these novels, I would like you to see within that prospective and I will leave it open ended be on that point. The first novel that stared the imagination of the reading public in IIT for various reasons and I am not going to make judgmental qualitative statements about the quality of the writing or anything of that kind I am mainly interested in the thematic aspect.

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So, Chetan Bhagat's Five Point Someone was subtitle what not to do at IIT and therefore, he you know harped on that fact I say it is not going to teach you how to get into IIT or even survive it and. In fact, it describes how bad things can get if you do not thing straight this was a what he said now interestingly this novel became a best seller precisely be because it evokes a sense of connection with hidden layers of IIT system which as I said is parts of the national discourse. So, that is also not. So, surprising were is also lot of curiosity about the hidden layers of IIT life there lot of ambivalence also in the reading public well the search for identity in five point someone revolved round the IIT system and also the label the identity that it provides to the protagonist. And it the novel ends.

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In fact, with this resolution you know it is strange I might have passed out of IIT, but in some ways my sole is still their may be in the hostel corridors or at sasi's or at the insti roof. And therefore, the identities of Alok, Ryan and Hari are shaped by their struggle within the IIT system, no new question is really raised about IIT system or about liberation of any kind academic or any other kind.

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Now, you know very well, you know it better than I do that the film three idiots actually captured these issues in a very very powerful way. And also advance discourse in a

significant way this is I see this as a very positive intervention in critiquing the unexamined educational views of the middle class through what they have described it Mister Hirani has described as a comedy of ideas.

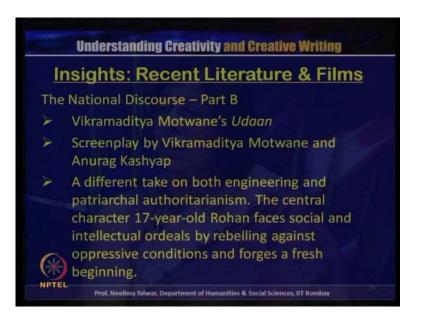
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Now, what have they done really lets quickly look at that I personally feel that the film. Of course, it is a wonderful addition to the need for discourse about what we are doing and what we are not doing right. But it is really seen through a male gaze it equates engineering with patriarchy and authoritarianism the identities of the protagonist rancho Farhan, Raju. These are shaped through self-actualizations. This a word a term that we will explain this was use by Mister Hirani in the description of this film and I am coating him. So, these are shaped through self-actualization as opposed to Chatur who typifies unexamined middle class aspiration.

So, there is lot of this force on you know re doing things that are wrong finding one's own path and in that sense it is a very very important popular intervention in terms of educational discourses. Bhagat's, Bildungsroman has triggered this cinematic intervention in middle class attitudes and as I said through very successful humors that has gone down well with the audience.

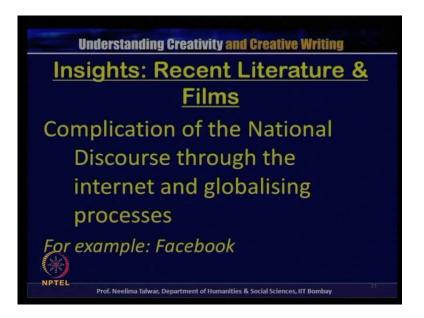
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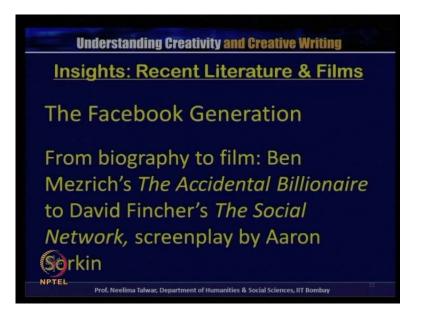
But the film that I really captures my own imagination is Vikramaditya Motwane's Udaan where these are very different take on both engineering and patriarchal authoritarianism. The central character seventeen year old Rohan faces social and intellectual ordeals by rebelling against oppressive conditions and he forges a fresh beginning is not to suggest that it does not happen in three idiots. Obviously, Rancho's character is a highly romanticize fairy tale like wonderful example which also you know captures the contribution of many many people like that with come out of with IIT system. They have gone in different direction and they have done very very valuable work.

So, this is not to undermined that at all, but I think there is a you know great deal of questioning of the basic parameters in of what this whole layers of blindly equating certain kind of education and certain kind of power structure to gain more power oneself without questioning. This is captured in a very moving way in Udaan. And therefore, it ends with more realistic sense of possibilities, and also there is greater degree of this ordeal and resolution of the Ordeal in Udaan which seeks a totally different direction.

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What is interesting is these are all part of the national discourse and what has complicated our national discourse of course, is the presence of the internet and the globalizing processes. And in terms of use and youthful modes of communication, youthful possibilities, in terms of survival, in terms of productivity, there are lot of issues that the internet has raised. But I think in terms of the youth culture the Facebook phenomenon is something that we can again briefly dip into again from the point of you of Bildungsroman and how it is a form of fiction that is able to capture this theme in a very interesting way. And cinematically also its available to you for dipping in to this experience of other people, not your own, but this will help you reflect on your own experience. (Refer Slide Time: 38:21)



You can look at the film the social network, which is actually based on a biography. Tgain the link between biography memoir and bildungsroman we have already talked about. So, this is a based on biography, The Accidental Billionaire and then David Fincher's has directed the social network and the screenplay was return by Sorkin.

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Now, here also the social experience of college life is evoked, there is very strong sense of realism in depicting friendship, class jealousy, modern ambition and of cause great invention the facebook. This is a youth oriented film directed and interpreted by mature professionals that found is very very interesting while looking at this film and then also looking at these interviews of the director, the actors, the writer of the screenplay. I found it really interesting to see how well this dialogue between the you know mature professionals, and their interpretations and that of the interpretation of the same experience of young life for youth and education is a carried out between these two sides. And I think I am going to dip into that later on found it really very exciting..

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Now, of course, the film in itself it talks about a latest institutions and inventiveness through the warring prospective of the super-smart young men. So, again there is although there is all the success of the facebook, but the film leaves you very troubled by the lack of communication the also the friendsy restlessness of these young people. And you may see well the inventiveness also came out of it, but I think we need to look this whole phenomenon from our own prospective a little more critically.

What it has also done is to these forms of communication, they of course, have positive and negative both. But they have created multiple modes of communication that encourage virtual socialization and lot of role playing. So, this is complicated our national discourse also, because it is also part of our sensibility now specially if in terms of the educated people and those who have the privilege position of getting educated or privilege position to teach.

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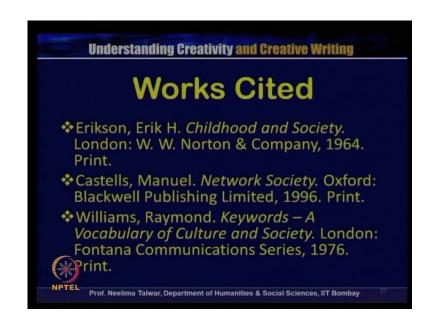
So, I think what you can do is to ask yourself questions about liminality and transformation by looking at your own authenticity and reflection and exploration of your own autotelic drives on the one hand and also by a deeper and more widespread examination of the current educational systems in India and how they are part of our national discourse. So, what are we doing with our selves how are we shaping our lives how are we therefore, in that sense shaping the life of the country or of the diaspora. But in any case the meaning the direction the sense of purpose is this something that we can talk about and you know help define things in a different way.

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So, I would say finally, as a concluding remark that there is great deal of this need for establishing dialogue about these issues within families. Especially, about the significance of choosing one's own vocation through choices rather than coercion. So, I would say that I am really speaking on the side of youth. And change Abraham Maslow's notion of self actualization can be the lead term for these discussions where he talked about self actualization as the discovery, and fulfillment of one's full potential. And that is the term Mister Hirani had also used while describing his film and these three characters who are self-actualized eventually and this is what we would like for all of us.

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And finally, we have work sighted list for you, so that it facilitates it is your reading and also viewing of films. We will dip in to this quickly, we start with erikson Childhood and Society, you can look at the chapter that deals with eight stages of man. Castells Manuel is mentioned although we have very briefly dipped in to this idea, but for your future reference, you can look at this book read it, it will add to your depth of understanding of technological changes.

Raymond Williams keywords, we have already mention that in terms of the films three idiots directed by Mister Rajkumar Hirani, and social network directed by David Fincher, Udaan directed by Vikramaditya Motwane this completes our list. And we are are sure that you will enjoy looking at films, you will enjoy reading these books, but you will enjoy most is this infinitely beautiful process of discovering yourself slowly and also the processes that help you discover not just the end product, but the process is also.

Thank you.