

**Dept. of English, Karanjia (Auto) College, proposes to
host a seminar
on 22.11.2019 with RPs and delegates from the State, out of
the state & abroad**

Topic :-Revisiting the Early Indian Fiction : Representation of Reading,
Writing and Society.

Last date for submission of full paper- 03.10.2019

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Sd/-
Principal
Karanjia (Auto) College, Karanjia

Call for paper follows

**Department of English, Karanjia Autonomous College, Karanjia,
Dist- Mayurbhanj, Odisha (India)**

Seminar onDate: 22 November 2019

Revisiting the Early Indian Fiction: Representation of Reading, Writing, and Society
Concept Note

Early Indian fiction characterizes a hungry activity of the writers and an equally hungry passivity of the readers- So said the twentieth-century British novelist, man of letters and intellectual Aldous Huxley in an essay entitled "Writers and Readers." He was talking about the fate of writing and reading in the modern consumer culture that arose in the twentieth century Britain and elsewhere in the world and that catered to a consuming appetite for sensations, gratifications and quick fixes. Writers and readers were put into mutually exclusive guilds of producers and consumers as a result.

Fast forwarding from the 1960s when Huxley made this diagnosis of the present digital age where we find our world literally inundated with textuality the same divide between producers and consumers can be seen. Even as the word proliferates in the limitless digital expanse, it is further unmoored from its setting, being uttered/keyed in and read on our tablets and smart phone screens on the go. As David Denby has perceptively observed in his book *Lit Up* (2016), Internet writing or writing in the electronic media is fast, facile and dizzyingly illusory. It barely registers in the mind as it streaks across the screen. Any notion one ever entertained of the power of the word, of the word as 'eloquent technology' (Eric Cheyfitz) has to be forgotten like a bad dream, as we watch its complicit, consumerist character in our digital age. It is then salutary to be reminded of an earlier era of production and

consumption of the written word, an era in which the word was powerful, provocative and was wielded for transformative purposes. The writing of it was as significant for purposes of social enquiry as was the reading of it for purposes of self-assertion and world recognition. It is of course an earlier era of our print culture tied to the rise of the novel.

This seminar will explore the power of the word and its ability for self-representation as well as for the representation of society by an act of revisiting the early Indian novel, say from the turn of the 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century. The focus on the national and the local scene is dictated both by the context – the local corner of the English studies scene that we occupy – and by the felt need for revival of a time when the writing of the word and reading of it was a vote for changing our life, mired in superstitions and hobbled by roadblocks of rank, caste and gender, for the better. Naturally it provoked a reaction from those bastions of power and privilege, a reaction that expressed itself as a warning to keep away books, meaning novels. This is a fact that is graphically registered in KrupabaiSathianadhan's *Saguna* (1889). But clearly she or her English language novel was not alone. A whole battery of novels arose in the late 19th and the early 20th century in Indian languages which centre-staged the phenomenon of writing and reading as emancipatory acts.

One thinks of some prominent novels like *Indulekha* by O. Chandu Menon, *Debi Choudhurani* by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, *Sevasadan* by Premchand, the short fiction of Fakir Mohan Senapati, and *Basanti* by nine writers, to name only a few. As Chandras Choudhury has pertinently observed in a recent piece that he has written on the emancipator potential of reading in the early Indian novel, "To show a character—especially a woman—reading was to show her thinking, reasoning, reconsidering her position in society and her relationship to patriarchal tradition, and becoming, page by page and line by line, an individual in ways newly sanctioned in the West but unfathomable or undesirable in the world in which the early Indian novelists lived."

There are clearly many more examples from the early Indian novelistic tradition. One major objective of the seminar is to invite scholars and researchers to explore this field and to come up with more stories and narratives from the past, which will change the compliant narrative in our time, even in our digital time.

Scholars intending to present at the seminar can explore any of the following sub themes, including the main theme of the seminar.

- Representation of reading, writing and literacy in the early Indian fiction (region and language wise breakdown is implied here)
- Representation of gender, rank and caste or any one of these in novels and short stories belonging to this time period
- Readings that facilitate cross-regional comparison of themes
- Attitudes to English language and education in the early Indian novels and stories
- Ways of representing 'Indianness' and independence in the colonial era
- What might Indian fiction of today learn from the fiction of the past?
- Afterlife of the early Indian novels and stories through/in translation
- Reading early Indian fiction in a digital age