

Introduction to Cultural Studies
Dr. Avishek Parui
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology-Madras

Lecture - 13
Fanon – Black Skin, White Masks (Part - I)

Hello and welcome to this lecture, Introduction to Cultural Studies NPTEL Course. We just finished with Lyotard. We looked at the postmodern condition and looked at the ways in which postmodern condition creates some unique cultural identities, cultural formations, and cultural situations. So we will do today in this lecture we will start with a new text which is Frantz Fanon Black Skin, White Masks which is a profoundly political text.

As the very title suggests Black Skin, White Masks is about the colonial condition, is about how identity is produced in colonial conditions. How identity is subjugated in colonial conditions and more importantly how identities almost always is a product of violence, right. So how violence is very much a part of is embedded in the entire politics of production of identities in a colonial condition.

And the reason why we choose Fanon is that apart from being a philosopher, apart from being a you know a really profound critic or cultural commentator, he is someone who believes in or his writing reveals his belief in praxis, in real activity, in real actions. One of the things you notice immediately about Fanon is that this directness about his writing, his direct engagement with a real political situation in his writing.

It is not rhetorical, it is not jargon heavy and he speaks from a position of an insider, inside an activity as someone which is something which is already happening, certain cultural activity, as a colonial activity, as a political activity. So that is one of the first things which we know about Fanon and that characteristic that feature this revealed immediately in his writing; the directness, the clarity, the urgency for action, the urgency for activity, a sense of immediacy which are the characteristic features of Frantz Fanon's works.

Now this particular book *Black Skin, White Masks* as the very title suggests is about performative identities. It is how you can have black skin and put on a white mask and you become some different identity which is obviously a product of violence. It is a violent process of identity formation because what happens in the entire process is that you subjugate your skin identity your epidermal identity.

So epidermalization is a process that Fanon talks about quite sort of deeply in this particular book and we will talk about that later as we move on from that section but just to give you an idea a flavor of what this book is all about and the reason why we are looking at this book in particular in cultural studies because it is something which engages directly with the idea of anxiety of activities, anxiety of the activities which produce identities.

The anxiety to produce a privilege identity, a hegemonic identity and obviously along with that anxiety associated with the anxiety is a paranoia of being found out as a non-hegemonic identity, a non-dominant identity. So quite clearly there is a hierarchy in identities in the colonial condition. We saw that in power, we saw that in Orwell's *Shooting the Elephant* how this particular hierarchy also is associated with a sense of ambivalence, right.

So the hegemonic identity is also ambivalent because it has been hegemonic all the time whereas the ambivalence operates in some other way as well in terms of looking at how the colonized native wants to be like the colonizer. That is the aspirational activity, the aspirational identity by the process of becoming the colonizer he is obviously not the complete colonizer because he does not really have the real political power.

So he sort of half leaves behind his own identity, his original identity. So he ends up becoming a sort of half chopped identity and therein lies the violence. Therein lies the metonymic quality of identity production in the colonial condition which is what this book is all about, *Black Skin White Masks* and obviously one of the reasons why we go to Fanon along with the fact that he is a profound commentator on the cultural condition.

He is a profound activist who is really an (()) (04:10) with a real political and colonial condition is that he was also a psychiatrist by training. Now he is one of the real philosophers, one of the first real philosophers who brings in psychiatry and political condition in a really fascinating study of identity production and anxiety of identity production and the psychopathology related to anxiety production identity production in a colonial space.

So psychiatry in in Fanon's work becomes an instrument to look at the way in which identities are produced, subjugated, reproduced violated etc. and how this constant violence which is part of the identity production process becomes an endemic condition, becomes a pathological condition. So he is sort of someone who looks at the medical, medical extensions of this anxiety which is political in quality.

So this collusion between medicine and politics is something that Fanon studies and examines quite deeply and profoundly in his works and obviously a part of the psychiatry training that Fanon has is also used to critique the Eurocentric psychic, the Eurocentric you know psychological studies which were heavily racialized before Fanon.

So he exposes a racial character of European psychology or Eurocentric psychology and he talks about you know European trained psychologists and he mentions quite a few of them you know who talks about the Africans in terms of a very racist kind of rhetoric. He talks about the low intelligence of African as the innate murderers, violence in Africans. All these are very racist connotations that sort of published in quite sophisticated journals and European medicine, European psychology etc.

And Fanon is one of the first philosophers from the first people really to critique the tradition, to critique the biomedical or biopolitical branding of a certain race in terms of essentializing it as a murderers, violent kind of a race. So *Black Skin, White Masks* does a lot of things. It reveals the violence of identity production. It reveals a very complex and almost evil collusion between medicine and politics in terms of branding a certain race, in terms of branding a certain ethnicity and more importantly it also talks about the aspiration activity in the part of the colonized.

So what can the colonizer do in this kind of an identity production why he is branded as a noble savage, benevolent savage or an anarchic and murderer savage or violent savage. So what can a colonizer do in these conditions? So *Black Skin, White Masks* is a profound commentary on the culture of production of identities in a particular colonial condition where identities are extremely unequal and this inequality of identities is what creates the violence in the first place.

So before we begin with Fanon's works before we begin with Fanon words directly into his language let us first take a look at 2 introductions which we use in this particular book. So this book has a couple of introductions.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:08)

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword to the 2008 edition by Ziauddin Sardar</i>	vi
<i>Foreword to the 1986 edition by Homi K. Bhabha</i>	xxi
<i>Translator's Note</i>	xxxviii
Introduction	1
1 The Negro and Language	8

The first is by Ziauddin Sardar and the second is by Homi Bhabha. So we will take a look at both these introductions and we probably spend this first lecture on Fanon examining these introductions and how the introductions set out really to describe what Fanon does later on in this particular book.

So how these introductions talk about the subjugate Fanon as a cultural critic, the subjugate Fanon as a political commentator and how they sort of look at the significance of Fanon's works especially the relation to the world we live in today because the manner in which Fanon was living he was not really studied extensively. He was not really considered to be a profound philosopher or a profound cultural critic.

It is only after his death and he died very early, very young. It is only after his death that his importance as a cultural commentator was truly emphasized and resurrected and not least with the help of Jean-Paul Sartre who wrote this really fabulous introduction to, *The Wretched of The Earth*, another of Fanon's books where he talks about the importance of Fanon as the philosopher of the colonial condition, a work we learn from Fanon both as people who colonizes versus people who were colonized, right.

So he gives you a direct commentary on the colonial condition and the direct directness and the clarity of expression that Fanon has makes him almost a universal philosopher as someone who speaks of times which are universally valid for humanity across spaces, across times, across cultural conditions. So Louis speaks specifically on the French-Algerian condition, that is the condition he talks about, the French-Algerian colonial condition.

But you know the directness of his expression, the clarity of his expression, the sophistication of his expression they find you know relevance in almost all conditions where colonialism was operative as instrument of torture, instrument of you know discrimination, instrument of domination, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:05)

leads to dignity. Black Skin, White Masks offers a very particular definition of dignity. Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's Self. Black Skin, White Masks charts the author's own journey of discovering his dignity through an interrogation of his own Self—a journey that will not be unfamiliar to all those who have been forced to endure western civilization.

So let us first take a look at you know Sardar's book, Sardar's introduction, Ziauddin Sardar's introduction to this particular book Black Skin, White Masks where he gives you sort of introduces to what this book is all about. What is Black Skin, White Mask all about. Now first of all he says Black Skin, White Masks and I have highlighted the sections which are important for us, Black Skin, White Masks offers a very particular definition of dignity.

So dignity becomes a very important category in Fanon. It becomes a discursive category, it becomes an essential category, it becomes a psychological category. So what does Fanon mean by dignity. So dignity is ability of particular self, a particular human being to live with agency, to live with freedom, freedom of expression, freedom of you know speech, freedom of movement and freedom of identity more importantly.

So dignity is that kind of condition which does not make you anxious or aspirational to assume a certain kind of identity just because it is a privilege, just because it is hegemonic and it is that kind of a condition which does away with any kind of subjugation to knowledge, subjugation of identity etc. So Black Skin, White Masks offers a very particular definition of dignity. Dignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization.

It is not about assuming the attitudes of the master who has allowed his slaves to eat with at his table. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's self. Black Skin, White Masks charts the author's own journey of discovering his dignity through an interrogation of his own self; a journey that will not be unfamiliar to all those who have been forced to endure western civilization.

So dignity in Fanon becomes a very important category. It becomes an ontological, psychological as well as a political category as I mentioned and the discursive quality of dignity has to be highlighted over here because dignity you know is that condition which is not marked by any anxiety to emulate the colonizer. It is not marked by any anxiety to or any aspiration to mimic the colonizer.

It is that condition which allows you the freedom to be what you are as an ethnic self as a cultural self as a racial self as a political self and as an existential self. So your race, your ethnicity, your language, your politics, your gender, your body belongs to you. And that sense of belonging, that sense of ownership over who we are, over yourself really is what constitutes dignity in Fanon's work and that is something that Sardar highlights very beautifully I think in the very beginning of this particular introduction.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:33)

their lives. Fanon also began to use psychoanalysis to study the effects of racism on individuals, particularly its impact on the self-perception of blacks themselves. During the 1950s metropolitan France was a center of revolutionary philosophy and a magnet for writers, thinkers and activists from Africa. Fanon imbibed the ideas of philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre; and became friends with Octave Mannoni, French psychoanalyst and author of *Psychology of Colonization*. As a young man searching for his own identity in a racist society, Fanon identified with the African freedom fighters who came to France seeking allies against European colonialism. He began to define a new black identity; and became actively involved in the anti-colonialist struggle. So when, in 1953, he was offered a job as head of the psychiatric department of Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algiers he jumped at the opportunity.



Now, as I mentioned and this is what Sardar goes on to describe later on that you know Fanon also began to use psychoanalysis to study the effects of racism on individuals particularly its impact on the self-perception of blacks themselves. During the 1950s metropolitan France was a center of revolutionary philosophy and a magnet for writers, thinkers and activists from Africa. Fanon imbibed the ideas of philosophers Jean-Paul Sartre and became friends with Octave Mannoni, French psychologist and author of *Psychology of Colonization*.

A young man searching for his own identity in a racist society, Fanon identified with the African freedom fighters who came to France seeking allies against European colonialism. He began to define a new black identity and became actively involved in the anti-colonialist struggle. So when in 1953 he was offered a job as the head of the psychiatry department in the you know Blida-Joinville Hospital in Algiers he jumped at the opportunity.

So as you can see in the very beginning what Sardar tells you quite interestingly is that how Fanon was profoundly influenced by philosophy and of course he was a psychiatrist by training and he was living at a time when psychoanalysis was heavily was beginning to get racialized, right and this is something which we need to understand in cultural studies.

Because part of the cultural studies, a large part of cultural studies as I hope to have established by now is about identity formation and identity formation is of course a discursive process and this discursive process includes a lot of material apparatus which includes medicine. So medicine becomes a very important instrument in classification in cultural studies especially in colonial conditions where identities are inequally distributed, right.

So psychoanalysis, psychiatry these become very handy instruments of discrimination, very handy instruments of classification, racist classifications in colonial times. So what Fanon does, he uses psychoanalysis to study the effects of racism. So what can, what effects does racism have on on subjects who suffer racism in the sense of you know being discriminated, the sense of being tortured, the sense of being left out, the sense of being subjugated.

So these become almost pathological conditions after a point of time and this constant replication of discrimination, the constant replication of domination so this this generates a sense of inferiority, a sense of alienation if you will. And alienation becomes a very important category in Fanon's works but this alienation is not just a Marxist elevation where the producers remove from the product but also a profound existential elimination.

And we saw when we read Orwell's Shooting the Elephant how alienation can be a compound of the Marxist category which is materialistic as well as a more existential category which is more psychological. So psychoanalysis of Fanon becomes a very interesting instrument with which he studies or examines the effects of alienation in colonial conditions.

And of course so he was someone who was profoundly influenced by philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre as you know was a philosopher in the existentialist tradition and existentialism of course is about you know does examine the selfhood of man, the sense of selfhood of man especially the

way it navigates with his material surroundings, especially the way it navigates with his ideological discursive surroundings.

So Sartre becomes a very important figure in any study of Fanon and as I mentioned Sartre wrote a really famous preface to Fanon's *Wretched of The Earth* where he talks about how this particular book *Wretched of The Earth* is a profound book in exposing the hollowness of European civilization, exposing the hollowness of European imperialism and talking about how you know identity, self, agency these are subjugated systematically in colonial conditions.

So the sense of subjugation, the sense of being subjugated becomes subjugated becomes a pathological condition and that is something that Fanon studies with his psychoanalysis, with his training in psychiatry, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:31)

Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* when he was 27. Published in 1952, it was his first and perhaps most enduring book. And it was ignored. Its significance was recognized only after the death of the author, particularly after the publication of the English translation a decade and a half later in 1967. It was a year when anti-war campaigning was at its height; and student strikes and protests, that began at Columbia University, New York, started to spread like wildfire across the United States and Europe. Martin Luther King was leading the civil rights movement and was to be assassinated a year later. Advocates of black power were criticizing attempts to assimilate and integrate black people. The book caught the imagination of all who argued for and promoted the idea of black consciousness. It became the bible of radical students, in Paris and London, outraged at the exploitation of the Third World.

So that gives you a very interesting idea of the location of this particular book. So when was this book written. What stage in Fanon's life was this book you know sort of produced and what were the what were the cultural climate which produced this particular book. So what was the culture throughout that Fanon was consuming, that Fanon was a part of and Fanon was critiquing.

So again like is said I mean this is something I keep saying throughout this particular course that any text is produced out of context. You cannot possible divorce the text from its context, right.

So the context determine the text to a great extent. So what kind of book is being written is largely determined by the cultural conditions, the political and discursive conditions of that particular time and that is a bit of a cliché in cultural studies, is something which we assume automatically.

Now for this particular book *Black Skin, White Masks*, obviously this was written at a time where you know French imperialism was at its hideous peak and Algeria was a French colony. So it is largely this interaction in Algerian condition and the French condition or Algerian-French condition or French-Algerian condition which obviously was characterized by discrimination, characterized by racism, characterized by hierarchy which is you know one of the grand narratives of colonialism as we know it.

So Fanon wrote *Black Skin, White Masks* when he was 27. So he was quite young when he wrote it. Published in 1952 it was his first and perhaps most enduring book and it was ignored unsurprisingly. So it was a book which was written at a time where you know the mainstream publishing society, the mainstream British, the mainstream European clientele was not ready for this book at all.

Because this was a book which was written from the other side, right. It was a book written you know by someone who actually suffered colonialism, someone who actually suffered the discrimination of imperialism and someone who actually spoke back in a way that was sophisticated and erudite and compelling. So it was something which was conveniently ignored by the White mainstream hegemonic press or the White mainstream hegemonic leadership at that time in 1952.

So it was ignored. Its significance was recognized only after the death of the author particularly after the publication of the English translation a decade and a half later in 1967. So again the politics of translation becomes a very important you know very important method in making someone famous, in making a writer sort of visible to the White audience because the original book is from the French of course and it was sort of relatively ignored or relatively sort of not given an important setoff.

But only after this English translation a decade and a half later, 15 years later in 1967 was the it was resurrected in terms of its significance. It was the year when anti-war campaigning was at its height and student strikes and protests that began at Columbia University. New York started to spread like wildfire across the United States and Europe.

So again why this is a very important and a very interesting study, why certain books become important suddenly at certain points of time; so what are the cultural conditions which sort of condense together as it were to invest importance to a particular book which was relatively forgotten previously. So this particular book, *Black Skin, White Masks* is a classic case in point because when it was originally published in 1952 it was ignored.

It was not really paid importance, paid attention to at all. But it is only after 1967 when student protests were at the height when there was general agreement about the evils in imperialism and general agreement about the evils of the grand narratives of European power, European hegemony, European control etc. While there was student protest in the streets of Paris when and this entire idea of the independence of Algeria became you know an almost national you know cry among the young people across France.

It is only then at that particular cultural climate this particular book was resurrected. So this became a very important book at that point of time because it was the time which was ready to relate to this particular book. So this idea of being ready to relate is very important when when it comes to assigning importance to certain books. So when certain books become important at certain points of time it is just about being in sync with the contemporary or with that kind of cultural climate which is around at that point of time.

So that certainly was the time generally a protest, generally a student unrest, generally of cries against you know evils of imperialism and it was also the birth of post-structuralism you know of post-structuralism as a phenomenon was coming to being was really shaping up in a sort of massive way at that time. So it is not a surprise to us that it was that time which is ready to sort

of read and resurrect and relate to this particular book which is published half a decade, one-and-a-half decades earlier.

So Martin Luther King at that time was leading the civil rights movement and was to be assassinated a year later. Advocates of black power were criticizing attempts to assimilate and integrate black people. So this was the time where black intellectuals, the black protestors were really sort of coming together in a massive way, in a profound way, in a very instrumental way, in a compelling way and critiquing the evils of imperialism, critiquing the evils of racism, critiquing the evils of you know looking at black people as some kind of an essentialized category.

And Martin Luther King was obviously one of the you know forefronts of this particular struggle. So he was assassinated a year later in 1968 as you know. So this was the time when this kind of debates were at the hike at the peak. So it is unsurprising that Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks* was massively popular at that point of time. So the book caught the imagination of all who argued for and promoted the idea of black consciousness.

It became the bible of radical students in Paris and London, outraged the exploitation, outraged at the exploitation of the Third World. So even the metropolitan white students in Paris and London were outraged when they read the book *Black Skin, White Masks* because as I mentioned in the very beginning, this is a book which is a very compelling revelation of the evils, the torture, the assassinations, not just assassination with physical but also identity assassination which happens during colonialism.

So it obviously becomes a very revealing text which tells you what really takes place during imperialism. What really takes place in colonialism. So it is bit of an insider's account if you will of the evils of colonialism as seen by Fanon and as described by Fanon.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:01)

Black Skin, White Masks was the first book to investigate the psychology of colonialism. It examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized, how an inferiority complex is inculcated, and how, through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors. It is due to the sensitivities of Fanon, says Ashis Nandy, that “we know something about the interpersonal patterns which constituted the colonial situation, particularly in Africa.”² Fanon began a process of psychoanalytic deconstruction that was developed further first by Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy* and then by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). Other theorists of colonial subjectivity have followed in their footsteps.

And the reason why and I come back to the point again, the reason why this becomes a really revelatory book, a really compelling argument is because Fanon looks at colonialism, looks at the effect of colonialism from a medical perspective as well. So it is not just a political text. It is not just a text which is sort of politically important.

It is also a text which is medically important or bi-politically important because he is using psychology, he is trained psychiatrist and he is using the psychological training, his training in psychiatry to look at the effect of colonialism as a systematic process of exploitation, as a systematic process of other formation, a systematic process of you know projecting inferiority or you know inventing inferiority of a certain population of people.

And what happens if you keep consuming this idea of inferiority? What happens if you keep suffering this subjugation of dominant power. So you know it is that kind of a book where the medical and the political coexists as instruments of study, instruments of examination. So Sardar says over here *Black Skin, White Masks* was the first book to investigate the psychology of colonialism. It examines how colonialism is internalized by the colonized.

How an inferiority complex is inculcated and how through the mechanism of racism, black people end up emulating their oppressors. So you know racism works in surreptitious ways. So I mean obviously it can work as a blunt way of torture, discrimination, exploitation etc. But racism

can also work more effectively as a means of consent; how if you manage to create consent, if you manage to inculcate the idea of inferiority on the colonized population then you get ((23:44) subjects.

You basically you know end up aspiring for the colonizers position because the colonizers position becomes a privilege position in their imagination, right. So that becomes more of a psychological condition then. So that is the second level of imperialism, the second level of racism, right. Because you know racism would excel would triumph completely when it manages to become a psychological condition where you consume it without questioning.

You consume the superiority of the white man without questioning it. You consume the superiority, you presuppose the superiority of the you presuppose the privilege of the colonizer without questioning it and therein lies the greatest triumph of imperialism or racism, okay. So you know then we have black people emulating unquestioningly emulating the oppressors.

So it is due to the sensitivities of Fanon as Ashis Nandy says that we know something about the interpersonal patterns which constituted the colonial situation particularly in Africa, right. So Fanon talks about the interpersonal patterns, how this kind of an activity of emulation, aspiration, anxiety becomes an interpersonal category, an interpersonal narrative which marks the colonial condition you know in a very solid kind of a way, in a very regimented kind of a way.

So Fanon began the process of psychoanalytic deconstruction that was developed further by Nandy in *The Intimate Enemy*. So Ashis Nandy has this really interesting book called *Intimate Enemy* where he talks about where he sort of draws in Fanon to a large extent and then extends the argument further. But looking at the way in which the entire idea of other-ing, the entire idea of being an other, being this inferior or the exotic other becomes a profoundly psychological condition.

And it can be sort of psychoanalytically through prism of inferiority complex. How inferiority complex becomes a narrative which is sort of created and consolidated by the different vectors,

the various vectors of imperialism and racism. So Fanon began a process of psychoanalytic deconstruction.

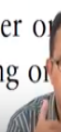
So again we are talking about 2 different categories coming together, psychoanalysis and deconstruction coming together to produce psychoanalytic deconstruction which basically reveals the constructed quality of this you know the artificial quality of the artifact of the white man's supremacy and so the white man's supremacy, the white man's superiority becomes an artifact of the highest order which obviously creates the other artifact which is the non-white man's inferiority, right.

And the whole point of this successive colonialism, the successive racism is how does artifacts began to pass off his givings began to pass of his unquestioned or unquestionable givings which are just presupposed in the colonial conditions. So, so Fanon was one of the first people really to begin a sophisticated study of this collusion between you know medicine and politics and that is something which is deconstructed later by Ngugi wa Thiong in Decolonising The Mind 1968, right.

The other theorists of colonial subjectivity have followed in their footsteps. Okay, so what makes Fanon an important person in cultural studies. Why we are interested in Fanon at all in terms of looking at the identity production, the violence of identity production, the violence of cultural identity from productions etc. And the reason is not far to see as Ziauddin Sardar tells you immediately.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:25)

Fanon writes from the perspective of a colonized subject. He is a subject with a direct experience of racism who has developed a natural and intense hatred of racism. When it comes to experience, this is no ordinary subject: already the author has fought for the resistance in the Caribbean and France, has been wounded near the Swiss border, and received a citation for courage. He has a professional interest in psychoanalysis and speaks of Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler, and Carl Gustav Jung without much distinction. He is going to offer us a *psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem*, he says. But we can be sure that this is not a therapy session. Fanon is no armchair philosopher or academic theorist. He has a more urgent and pressing thing on his mind: liberation.



Fanon writes from the perspective of the colonized subject and this is up in your screen. Fanon writes from the perspective of the colonized subject. He is a subject with a direct experience of racism who has developed natural and intense hatred of racism. So he is someone who has a firsthand experience of suffering racism, right. So and racism is something which is not just a dry, discursive thing for Fanon. It is a lived experience, it is an experiential category for Fanon.

And from this experientiality of racism he offers an active engagement which deconstructs racism. So we have to understand that when we read Fanon he is not really a cold, dry, a clever intellectual who is passing off lovely theories to examine racism, to examine discrimination, to examine you know biases in colonial conditions. No, but he is someone who actually experiences it and he speaks from his position of experience.

This is what I mean when I say he gives you insider's account of how racism works. He gives an insider's account of how discrimination works and that is why he is so important for us today. This insidedness the clarity or the directness of his experience so you know racism or colonialism become experiential conditions to Fanon. No just dry, discursive conditions, okay.

So and then of course this whole idea of deconstruction is idea of opening up the grand narratives, exposing the grand narratives of imperialism and racist is written away which is deliberately discontinuous; deliberately fragment. So there is a change in style off and on. He

lives across registers of resentment. So there is direct resentment of discursive resentment and all this different registers of resentment become very important in Fanon because that is part of the process which is deconstructing the old grand narrative of racism where which operates primarily on the presumed supremacy of one race and the presumed inferiority of the other race, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 29:18)

There is an urgency to *Black Skin, White Masks* that bursts from its pages. The text is full of discontinuities, changes in style, merging of genres, dramatic movement from analysis to pronouncements, switches from objective scientific discussion to deep subjectivity, transfers from theory to journalism, complex use of extended metaphors, and, not least, a number of apparent contradictions. As a genuine, and dare I say “old fashioned” polymath, Fanon is not afraid to use any and all the tools and methods at his disposal: Marxism, psychoanalysis, literary criticism, medical dissection, and good old aphorisms. And he is just as happy to subvert them—a livid subversion that some would see as contradiction. But above all the text has an immediacy that

So and hence we have the text is full of discontinuities, changes in style, merging of genres, dramatic movement from analysis to pronouncements, switches from objective scientific discussion to deep subjectivity, transfers from theory to journalism, complex use of extended metaphors and not least, a number of apparent contradictions. So you know all these different categories come together in Fanon’s writing.

So it is a fragmented text with which basically deals with discontinuities because it talks about discontinuities and identity. So it is no wonder it is written in style which is discontinuous. So there is a frequent change of style and merging of different genres it becomes very dramatic in some ways. It becomes objective and scientific in some other ways. It becomes objective and actively involved in some other ways.

So it is somewhere it is that kind of text where emotions, passion, subjective passion, subjective emotions emerge with objective analysis and that is what makes it a really important text for us

today because it is not just theorizing on the colonial condition. It is actually speaking from our experience. It is speaking from our experiential position and that makes it such a vibrant and plural text. He merges theory with journalism.

He merges metaphors, he merges contradictions, he merges objectivity with subjectivity, he merges objective medical knowledge with first time subjective experience and all this merging come together. All this sort of very confused mergers which are happening in this particular book makes it actually a very important book for us today. It makes it a very poststructuralist kind of a text.

And again I go back to where we were just saying about the post structuralism which is simultaneous with the student protest, with this protest against the governments, with the protest against racism which is happening across the metropolitan centers of Europe including but not limited to London and Paris.

So the rise of post-structuralism the sort of spatio-temporal fragmentation, discontinuity so all these different categories of post- structuralism are actually historically synchronous with the rise of you know for instance the Algerian war of independence. So Fanon can be looked at as the philosopher of post-structuralism, as someone who is actually practicing post-structuralism in a real political space and his expressions his descriptions of colonial conditions are supremely post-structuralist are profoundly post-structuralist.

Hence he brings in different metaphors, he brings in different disciplines together in order to study the colonial condition in Algeria. And again as I mentioned although he is speaking specifically on the French-Algerian colonial condition the clarity of his expression, the humanness of his expression the humanity the universality of his expression gives it you know a timeless character.

So you know Fanon's descriptions could find resonance in almost all colonial conditions because he talks about the heartbeat, the beat, the real pulse with which colonialism and colonial oppression works. The real experience of being discriminated, there real experience of being

tortured, the real experience of being left out, the real experience of being alienated. So the reality of his experience gives us the sense of universality which makes him a supreme philosopher of colonialism, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:36)

as contradiction. But above all the text has an immediacy that engages and stirs us. We can feel a soul in turmoil, hear a voice that speaks directly to us, and see the injustices described being lived in front of our eyes. This is most evident in the chapter on “The Fact of Blackness.” Here, Fanon breaks out of all convention and simply lets his stream of consciousness wash on to the paper. *All this whiteness that burns me. I sit down at the fire and became aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is?* This directness, this simmering anger, makes us uncomfortable because “civilized society” does not like uncomfortable truths and naked honesty. But this is exactly what makes *Black Skin, White Masks* such a powerful and lasting indictment of western civilization.

And of course the most important chapter of this particular book is the chapter we will study in great details when we read the book. It is called The Fact of Blackness where he talks about the very idea of being black in a white space and how the fact of blackness becomes an ontological factor an exceptional factor. It becomes a lift to reality. It becomes a discursive reality. It becomes a discursive condition as well.

And again how this sort of this merge between discursivity and reality becomes very important in Fanon’s descriptions. So we see the injustices described being lived in front of our eyes. This is most evident in the chapter on The Fact of Blackness. Here Fanon breaks out of all convention and simply lets his stream of consciousness wash out on the paper. So it becomes a very subjective description of blackness, very subjective description of you know subjugation.

Hence we have this expression stream of consciousness. So it becomes a very firsthand narration of what he actually suffered as a human being who is racialised who is reified through this racial

metaphor, through this racial rhetoric and what does this reification do at the level of alienation, at the level of enmity at a human level, right?

So that is described to us in firsthand in this chapter *The Fact of Blackness* which gives it a vibrancy, a poignancy and which makes it profoundly human in quality. So all this whiteness that burns me. I sit down at the fire and became aware of my uniform. I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there, for who can tell me what beauty is? This directness, this simmering anger makes us uncomfortable because civilized society does not like comfortable truths and naked honesty.

So again this idea of whiteness that Fanon talks about is obviously an artifice. The whiteness he talks about is you know the black man speaking in a white man's tongue. So that that which makes a black person white. So this whiteness burns me. I sit down as Fanon says, I sit down at the fire and became aware of my uniform. So again uniform is something which you darn. You (()) (34:41) you put on and put off. So it has an artificiality to it.

It has an artificial quality to it, uniform and that is what makes it and also if you use the word uniform quite so carefully uniform comes from uniformity. So when you put on a uniform you are actually standardizing yourself. So you are doing away with subjectivity, you are doing away with your internal contradictions, you are doing away with who you are as a person and rather you are putting on a standardized jacket, a straight jacket rather.

So uniform produces uniformity of you know appearance of embodiment which does away with your sense of true self, what you are as a person, what you are as an Algerian, what you are as a person who belongs to a particular community. That is being done away with and what we have instead is a sense of uniformity which is standardized, which is so tragically you know levels out all differences.

So he looks he becomes aware of his uniform, of his white uniform and then he goes on to say I had not seen it. It is indeed ugly. I stop there for who can tell me what beauty is. So into this idea

of beauty and ugliness what becomes beauty notionally at a discursive level actually becomes ugly because it takes you away from what you are as a person, right.

So your sense of ownership on who you are, what you are as a person, the ownership of your self on your self goes away you know dissolves away and what we have in its place is a discursive, dominant discursive mode where uniform or the mask becomes more important than your face and your biological body than your free human will. So this directness, this anger, so anger again is a very important affect in Fanon. So he is a writer who makes you angry.

He is a writer who writes in a way which is designed to make you angry. So it is very you know it is a very agitated kind of writing, it is very animated language that he uses and part of the process of the anger is very sort of deliberate. It is a deliberately angry text which wants to do away with any kind of dry rhetoric, which wants to do away with all kinds of dry discursive theorizations.

But instead offers you, you know a very direct description of what it really means to be exploited, what it really means to be subjugated, what it really means to be tortured by the colonial condition. Tortured at an epistemic level, tortured at a physical level and a visceral level and at a level of embodiment as well. So this makes us uncomfortable. This particular book becomes a very uncomfortable text because civilized society does not like uncomfortable truth and naked honesty, right.

So the naked honesty and again nakedness becomes a very important category in Fanon. It is the directness of his expression, it is an explicit quality about his expression which makes it very unsettling because he does not really use metaphors, he does not really use he does not hide behind metaphors. So he does not hide beneath language. So he uses language to communicate, to actually screen his anger, to vent out his anger and that becomes unsettling from a position of the white colonizer's perspective. However, that is the whole point of Fanon.

He wants to unsettle, he wants to make the colonizer embarrassed. He wants to make the colonizer ashamed. So shame, anger, resentment, hostility so all these come together, all these

exist in Fanon's writing quite deliberately and quite directly and that this existence, this sort of this mixture of all these different attributes which is otherwise politically incorrect gives Fanon's writing a sense of clarity, a sense of sophistication, a sense of directness which makes it almost universal in his skill. So we will stop here today. We will continue with the lecture on Fanon in the subsequent session. Thank you for your attention.