

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture04

Sub Culture

We will now progress into what is called a subculture. Now, subculture is also as important as mass culture. It also relies on what we call as popular culture is a strain of popular culture. Now, the problem with subculture is that. It has, again, a number of definitions and meanings, but we will restrict it to from where it began and what meaning has been revolving around since then.

It is important to note that subcultures were initially seen as a form of deviance, debase, delinquency and how it got integrated. What is the historicity of the emergence of subcultures? Why in the first place these subcultures come into existence? Now, along with subculture, we will be later on discussing counterculture. There is a significant difference between subculture and counterculture.

And therefore, it is also at times seen that they are crossing over. Not the entire identity of what subculture means, crossovers to counterculture, but they take few and leave few. They also resist a few of the aspects of subculture and vice versa. so moving on to discuss what subculture means and how through the ages it has changed we will also look into why the first-place subculture emerged and who are the people who become part of these subcultures know the definition and origin. These subcultures, again, as I mentioned, do not have one, any one definition.

And people often do not agree with that one definition also. And it has dramatically changed through the years. That is something which is constant, which is the change. Now, it was first coined in 1940 and it stated that subcultures are a group of people who have something in common. These groups of people have something in common, this common again is different as we are going to study in subculture and this common again is construed differently in counterculture.

So expanding on this idea of common, we will see that Thornton has used the word community most often interchangeably to the term subculture. It has also been witnessed that the plurality of society because society is not one distinct entity, there are a number of societies. So, societies is another word other than community, which has been significantly closely associated with subcultures and this is important. Now, the public and the masses are innately opposite to subcultures by contrast subcultures have tended to envisage as to be envisaged as disenfranchised and disaffected and unofficial now

Many a times we see that mass or the mass culture gets integrated into the official or dominant or, sharing the power stream. But what happens with the subculture is that there is only disenfranchisement that is happening and there is disaffection. This is disaffected and also unofficial in nature. So this is basically talking about the nature of subculture. Now we come to the positioning of subculture.

It positions itself as the other and as deviant and debased. Now what I initially talked about how subculture has been constituted or what is the definition of meaning. It was initially associated with deviant culture, with debases. The word or the prefix sub itself means secondary culture. Therefore, the words like subordinate, subaltern, subterranean, have been used because of their secondary nature.

So from there, we associate sub to culture, which is not the mainstream culture. It is outside the mainstream culture. It is a secondary culture, which is evolved or been introduced. But it is in opposition to the mainstream culture. It is not part and parcel or a strain of the culture.

mainstream culture, but is always in opposition to the mainstream culture. That is again a key feature of what we call a subculture. The social groups labelled as subcultures have often been perceived from the lower strata or due to the social differences in class, race, ethnicity and age. Now, this again brings us to the discussion that subcultures often emerge from a place of resistance, it also emerges from a place of negotiation.

These terms also have their attachment to what we call as popular culture. And since subculture is a very extremely important part of popular culture, we attach these terms. These people are coming from the lower strata of the family who are

not in the mainstream society. They may be. They may be not part of mainstream society because of their class, their social differences, their race, because of their age and ethnicity.

Now, most often why age is very important in subculture because most of the subcultures have emerged as youth cultures. We will be looking into why most number of, cultures, subcultures that have emerged are youth cultures. significantly very important and many scholars, and writers across the globe have dealt specifically with youth subcultures. Now, moving into the discipline of academia or where it emerged, it was first noticed and the study of subcultures began is very important. We have the Chicago School.

We have the Birmingham School. We also have Du Bois who is kind of bringing the idea of subculture into studies. So it is a sociological lexicon from where we see subcultures coming into place. The roots were interested in exploring the diversity of human behaviour in the American city.

So the Chicago School of Sociology was interested in studying human behavior because it is so diverse. That was the first instinct to study subcultures in the American cities. We see that the emergence of popular culture coming from American cities like New York, the urban cities of America like New York. This Chicago school was formed in 1892, but the studies on or the research on subculture started only in 1970 by Robert E. Park, who was among one of the influential scholars. He also wrote an essay called *The City* in 1915, it was based on participant observations for exploring,

customs beliefs etc now in sociology we often use methodologies as participant observation and that is the one way that one of the ways to study the customs and beliefs of people now in this context If we read about India and if we read about the folk or the folklore of India, most of the early folklores that are written in English are by English people. Because of the colonization, because of the Christian mission, these people or the priests or the reverends used to go and settle amongst the local people, which are the, tribal people and they had the opportunity to be with them for years. They did participation observation and explored the customs and beliefs of these people and also collected the folklores, folktales which were later on published in English.

The academic legacies of the Chicago School and the Frankfurt School, as we have already talked about, was infused in the Birmingham School in the 1970s. So, it seems like Chicago School plus Frankfurt School is equivalent to what we call as Birmingham School it happened in the 1970s. The University of Chicago gained prominence for its efforts to understand deviant behaviors like drugs, petty crime, gang involvement, etc.

They proposed that these activities were a result of collective norms within specific urban areas with unique moral codes. Now, when Chicago schools started studying the sociology of these subcultures, they came to some analysis or a result, a kind of result They saw that these deviant behaviors were in the form of drug abuse, substance abuse, that it's also known as, petty crimes and gang involvement. So the formation of these gangs in the early, subculture time was because they were not part and parcel of the mainstream society, they came from an ethnicity and race where they did not get jobs.

So ultimately, this led to drug abuse. It led to gang formations. extortion became one of the key features of gang involvement in those times and the collective the result of collective norms within these specific urban areas was seen as a unique moral code. These youth gangs are in economically or ethically marginalized areas.

So they came from such areas which were or such neighborhoods where they were not economically good. Especially they were coming from ethnically marginalized areas. As I already mentioned, they were not anytime part of the mainstream society and no one catered to their needs. This impact, again, can be seen in opposition to the mainstream culture, the subcultures that evolved, and these youth gangs. in economically or ethically marginalized areas.

So marginalization is one of the reasons for the formation of subgroups. It is not always seen to be what we considered as the formation of the cults. To an extent we can, but initially, we cannot. Part of the defined collective mentality, developed among groups of young people within such sites of disadvantage.

So another reason is the disadvantage that they had. So the first disadvantage is that they are not in the mainstream society. The second disadvantage is that they are marginalized. Therefore, these disadvantages lead to the formation of subcultures.

They join a kind of criminal gang or youth gang or in drug or substance abuse, in petty crimes. Their involvement gets even deeper. Three people from the Chicago school kind of discussed youth culture in detail. One is Park, one is Thrasher the other is White. Cohen, who belonged to the Indiana University, he applied the same principle in order to, do the same similar kind of work and develop a theory in youth delinquency as a collective phenomena.

Now, youth delinquency, these are a term that has been used again and again in subculture. And from there, he theorized taking in the principles from the Chicago School or the approaches and he further developed it and calling it a collective phenomenon that it is not in integrations that it is happening but happening in a collective form or it could be that there is multiple subcultures emerging at the same time but the kind of reasons around it in a way seems to be similar even the involvement of the youth What are the reasons that the youth are the ones who are most involved in these kind of delinquencies? Because they were the ones who did not get proper education and they were not eligible for good jobs.

So, therefore, the youth was the most hit. Now, they did not know what to do in that time of leisure. Right. What to practice, what not to practice. That made them get involved in these kinds of subcultures, which are drugs, which is also, gang wars, petty crimes, etc.

This participation observation ethnography was practiced by most of the researchers there. It led to an outsider in technique. Now, this outsider-in technique, again, is a sort of methodology within participation observation, where the participant goes, stays with these people of the subculture, observes them as an outsider, and then comes back and reports the analysis, kind of writes it down. The other key feature of this approach is that the person should not be from the community, not at least ethnically. So, it's a newer experience.

If someone belongs to the same ethnicity, it might hinder the results because they already know the attributes of that particular ethnicity or race. But an outsider, therefore, the term outsider in technique is used. The outsider goes inside and observes. There comes the Birmingham School and the Birmingham School is as important as the Chicago School. Now, the Chicago School is addressing the problems of subculture in America.

But Birmingham School now caters to the audience in the UK, in Britain. Therefore, significantly a few striking differences that we will be observing in these two schools. The Birmingham School Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. Now, the studies of subcultures are based around distinct music and style. Groups such as teds, mods, skinheads, bikers and punks.

Now, this is the basic difference in the emergence of the subcultures that are seen in America and that are seen in the US. Sorry, in the UK. In the UK, it was more about a distinct kind of music, which was different from the mainstream. It was more about the distinct style. The groups such as TEDs, modes and also skinheads, the bikers and the punks, people wearing, doing a lot of piercing in their bodies, making a lot of tattoos, wearing a black T-shirt with skulls and kind of hellfire made in their t-shirts so these kinds of groups which were basically called punks then they had biker groups right whose agenda were to only go on rides in bikes you know kind of hindering with the everyday affairs possibly and then you had mods different kind of a hairstyle, which was, which used to be coloured. Many key sports persons also have been seen carrying mods in different colours. So it is basically not the kind of deviant culture that was there in America, but it is different. Then we have the primary method used to interpret this, youth cultures involves theoretical abstraction. This Birmingham school, Birmingham school is involved in theoretical attraction and it is influenced by cultural Marxism like Gramsci and Althusser. This approach often sidelines the voices of young people. So, there is no involvement in giving any sort of agency to the youth. However, Stan Cohen highlights that the lack of empirical evidence supporting the claim that Birmingham is giving makes it challenging to distinguish between indigenous and sociological explanations.

So, since the Birmingham school is basing itself on theoretical attractions, mostly in cultural Marxists like Gramsci and Marx not doing an empirical study may lead to a lot of assumptions. like the assumptions made by many scholars who were not in support of popular culture or mass culture. So somehow Birmingham School is also doing the same. Therefore, Stan Cohen, makes this claim supporting that it may make it challenging to distinguish between indigenous and sociological explanations.

So what is coming from these Indigenous people, the kind of subcultures that are witnessed and how are they going to distinguish it from the sociological

explanation? Now Simon Frith, again Frith we have here, then McRobbie and Graham Murdock were some critical deluge over the Birmingham School and they called out the orthodoxy of the Birmingham School in around the 1990s, which is very significant. Birmingham School, especially the centre, is quite renowned and famous for the work that it does. But people like Frith and Angela McRobbie and also Murdock challenging it and calling out is again a very important point which shouldn't be missed.

The term that emerged after or the meaning of the term subcultures that emerged from here was the term called neo-tribe. So instead of associating subcultures with deviant and debased or delinquent, they came up with a term called the neo-tribe and it sparked discussions and debate. Yet it held a more solid position as compared to deviance. So of course, deviance has a negative connotation.

more than the word neotribe. Therefore, it went on for discussions and debate. But still, it kind of found a solid position because it was anyways better in terms of the word deviance. Now, Birmingham sought to avoid the reductionist explanation of culture and of popular culture. To see culture as being itself a powerful force.

So, according to Birmingham School, culture itself is a very powerful force. Therefore, they avoided this reductionist explanation of culture, of popular culture itself in particular, making a claim that culture is very powerful force. Be it the culture of popular culture or be it the culture of the elite or, the dominant culture. So that comes from Birmingham School. We see and observe the difference between the Chicago school and the Birmingham school.

Quite important to note the difference. How they, kind of were called out by people for their orthodoxy. At the same time, they did not conduct empirical study, which kind of, again, is mentioned by Cohen. Stating that it might lead to assumptions in the first place. There are other key contributors in subcultural studies made by British scholars.

So what are the key contributions? First, subcultures emerge primarily among working-class youth. collectively resisting structural impediments to upward mobility. The important focused point that the British scholars have made is that it emerges from working-class youth and can be collectively seen as a form of

resistance, which is also seen in popular culture we discussed the romanticization and the problem that modern-day capitalism has with the romanticization of the middle class and it kind of restricts the upward mobility also speculator styles held ideological meaning beyond mere fashion now

One point that has come up from the Birmingham school is kind of the difference in the subcultures. One was style. Now, style is associated with fashion. Now, fashion is not just about wearing a kind of cloth or it's not just a piece of clothing. It has to do a lot with ideology.

A person who wears a certain kind of clothing endorses in a certain kind of ideology. It's not that simple that clothes can be seen as a form of resistance. The punks, where used to wear these tattered clothes, these black t-shirts with skulls and hellfire most often. What is the need or what is the reason behind it?

It has its meaning based on ideology, a different kind of set of ideology, which is not matching with the mainstream ideology. Then we have styles constituted a symbolic form of resistance. A kind of style which become very trendy. is also, in a way, a form of resistance.

Now, we often see at times, and it was very recent, that because of the ongoing war between Israel and Palestine, many people who attended the Oscar wore a piece of clothing or device, I would say rather, in solidarity with Palestine Now, which also means that it is a form of resistance or calling out the Israel government for the predicament of the state. Therefore, we see how the style is constituted as a symbol, as a form of opposition or resistance. Authorities and the media create moral panics. In this, in this phase of resistance or opposition that we are talking about in fashion, we see that the media is creating moral panics around it.

There could be two instances why this moral panic. One could be that Because of the moral panic, more people endorse doing that, and end up doing that. Even for AIDS Day, we see many of the cricketers wearing a pink ribbon on their sleeves during certain matches, you know, in solidarity with AIDS. So similar to what media does, it creates a sense of

moral guilt, a moral panic, as it has been called. Then the masses start to follow. In a way, they might not be part of that subculture, but unknowingly, they endorse

to that idea of subculture, that clothing or, the representation. Such resistance is highly ineffectual. Subculture styles itself is eventually co-opted and modified.

But again, these British scholars make a point. They say that this resistance is ineffective. It doesn't affect largely, the mainstream. It cannot affect. The effect might subside in a few days.

Because this subculture and especially style and fashion are a part and parcel of commodification and consumption. It is rooted in that. therefore, it has nothing to do with the sort of protest or opposition or, or resistance that it is trying to do, it will fail miserably because of its association with commodification. If one says that, okay, today, as a sign of protest, I'll wear black.

Everyone will wear black. Everyone will start buying black to show some sort of resistance and it will ultimately lead to mass production and mass consumption, that is commodification. Recently during Mother's Day, Mother's Day is celebrated, International Mother's Day is celebrated to kind of pay homage, and pay respect to the mothers. But the one who started Mother's Day

later after a few years started protesting against Mother's Day because of this idea of commercialization. She started with the protest against florists. So people started gifting and bringing flowers for their mothers as a sign of appreciation and then it got commercialized. So we see that even if there is a movement, a social movement attached, later on, it results in mass consumption or commodification of the cause itself.

Then we have Du Bois and the Atlanta School. Du Bois, again coming from the black ethnicity, has given propositions regarding the subculture. So he says that subcultures leave important legacy for subcultural studies, including a focus on empirical evidences from a variety of sources rather than moral supposition. So, the empirical evidences are coming from a variety of sources rather than sitting and assuming

what could be and why it is like that, based on the empirical evidence, the study develops. Attention to how structural opportunities and constraints impact life changes and local ideocultures. Now, there should be a point where the attention is given to how structural opportunities and constraints impact life and change

the local ideocultures. So we are here talking about the subcultures which have no structural opportunities, but

one can give a sort of, importance to how they are structuralized, these opportunities and these constraints and how it impacts the life of the people, especially the local, the neighborhood. Now, mapping the power relations and how inequalities intersect, including but not limited to social class and race. When we are talking about the dominant class or the mainstream class, it is attached to power relations, knowledge and power, and how power works. It is always in the hands of the state most often or the elite or the capitalist who controls the state, who controls the people, who can control the people and how inequalities intersect with the power relation, including but not limited to social class and race. So a certain race of people we often see will be lower in the social class ladder.

So in a way, they are going parallelly and at times they might intersect. More often than not, they do not intersect. But there are inequalities which are intersecting with the power relations. one of them being social class and the other being race.

The black school scholars at the Atlanta Sociological Laboratory have immensely contributed to this study and this laboratory formation in the Atlanta School for the Black Scholars resulted in the study of ethnicity and race. So particularly the last Point that we were discussing is coming from the laboratory of Atlanta Sociological School by the black scholars where they are talking about the limitations of intersection with the power, the powerhouse or the dominant or the mainstream culture of social class and race.