

# INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

## Lecture6

### History and Understanding of Indian Popular Culture

Hello, everyone. In the last module, we discussed in detail what is culture, what is popular, and what is popular culture in the larger context of popular culture and cultural studies as a discipline. But today we will be looking into the introduction of popular culture in India, the discourse of cultural studies in India. And for that, we need to understand that situating popular culture in India might be difficult and complex at the same time. In order to situate popular culture in India, we need to understand the implications and the limitations that India faces with its multi-ethnicity.

Or it could be seen as an opportunity to counter the cultural studies that are read globally we will look into the etymology of the formulations of the term, the popular, and the culture, as we also discussed the same when we started with the discussion of popular culture and cultural studies. , moving into this context, today we will be talking about cultural studies in India today. Sorry, popular culture studies in India today, issues and problems. by Simi Malhotra and the other one by Sharmila Rege, Understanding Popular Culture, Satya Shodhak and Ganesh Mela in Maharashtra.

Popular Culture Studies in India Today by Simi Malhotra discusses the issues and the problems with the definition or the etymology of the terms. popular culture studies. In the second work, which is by Sharmila Rege, she has situated the study of popular culture or the understanding of popular culture in Maharashtra. The discourse is that the culture around Maharashtra is very different from other parts of the country. How can it be a source to formulate or understand popular culture?

The answer to this could be that every other culture that is situated in India might be dealing with similar implications. it can act as a guide in order to study other

cultures also. According to Malhotra, she has given four approaches to understanding the issues and problems.

One, she situates in the Etymology, which is like the attendant terminology, which is the most important part, because without going into the etymology of the word popular, or also popular culture and cultural studies, it becomes difficult to understand Indian popular culture or cultural studies in a theoretical perspective. Next comes the ontology of popular cultural studies, where we see, and where we situate it. Third is the methodology of doing popular cultural studies. If you remember in the last, module, we discussed the methodologies which were basically participant observation, also empirical analysis of data.

Required and also, used how the methodology is different or how the Western methodologies cannot be used in order to study Indian popular culture or Indian culture or cultural studies altogether as a discipline. Last is ethics. When we initiate a kind of study, we need to adhere to the ethics or moral code of conduct norms. what could be the norms, the ethics of doing popular culture? She ventures into these four approaches through which we can understand

the problems and issues with studying popular culture or formulating it as a discipline. Before moving on to the approaches, there's a sociologist called Satish Deshpande, he says that culture is something unique and that makes it very special. But he also says that if you situate, a nationalist narrative around culture, it always tends to keep the culture or the world at large as backward and underdeveloped. these are two contradictions with which we start this discourse and we will keep in mind what Deshpande has told us.

Culture being special and unique at the same moment also keeps us backward and underdeveloped. The notion of popular culture and attendant terminologies in English, we need to situate in the languages that come from the nation, that come from India. There are challenges in defining this particular term, which is popular culture. And in order to understand, because it is coming from a multicultural and multilingual nation, the distinction in English.

In two ways Simi Malhotra approaches the etymology. First through nature. nature often refers to the physical world and its inherent qualities untouched by human influence. is the nature of the culture untouched by human influence?

Of course not. Culture is constantly evolving. can we say that it is a natural thing or is it a natural entity that we call culture? there starts the debate whether Culture is natural at all.

We often make these generalized statements. Oh, it is part of our culture. when did it become a part of your culture? Was it in the 18th century, whether it was in 2000 B.C. or is it in contemporary times?

So we see the culture evolving. That brings us to the issue and problem that culture is not natural. In a way evolved culture traditionally signifies the learned and transmitted aspects of human society contrasting with the natural world of course, it is contrasting with the natural world.

But again, having said that it is not natural. Western versus Indian perspective. So in the Western perspective, culture is often seen as accumulated knowledge of the customs and practices of a society. you go to different societies; you accumulate that knowledge and custom and practices and that in the West means culture. But in India, the word culture,

Means or is called Sanskriti or Sanskriti. It comes from a Sanskrit word. We will go into the details of that word as we move forward. India in terms of Sanskriti goes beyond And it comes from the word samskara, which means rectification or reform.

Samskara is basically a ritual in the Hindu tradition or Hindu religion. And it is Sanskrit coming from there. And samskara itself means rectification or purification or reform reformation. Sanskriti, again, which is equivalent to what is called culture, is coming from a change, a change that happens, a reformation that is taking place, a rectification.

Some sort of correcting nature is getting attached to the term culture through Sanskriti and Samskara in the Indian context. The etymology of culture and attendant terminology in India. We are looking into the Sanskrit roots as we saw Sanskriti coming from Samskara. The same sense would have ideally resonated with the word Christi. Christi in a way sounds more closer to krishi or cultivation.

If you go into the Hindi vocabulary, that Krishi is cultivation. However, in the Indian context, the term usually used is not Kristi, but Kriti. Two, or three similar

words, which are closer in pronunciation, but meaning different. Kristi, again, sounds somewhat like Kriti and Krishi.

If we situate it closer to krishi, it becomes cultivation, and culture again is a word which means cultivation. You culture something, you cultivate something and not kristi but kriti and then we have Sanskriti. Kristi becomes skriti, so "san" is added to it, and it becomes Sanskriti implications of the word samskriti.

The origin suggests that the culture in India is viewed as something that should be refined or improved. if we go by the implication of the term Samskriti, it means that you need some reformation. You need some sort of improvement. You are not perfect. You need some sort of refinement as well.

What does culture mean? Does it mean that the Sanskriti that we follow, needs improvement or is it getting improved day by day? So what is it? It carries a potential didactic or corrective connotation.

If we say reform, reformation is seen as a didactic terminology, or we say correctness also with similar meaning that it is teaching something. It is corrective in connotation, culture and control. We know that when we say that something needs to be corrected who is going to correct is the question. So there needs some reform.

There needs some correctiveness. But who is the one who is going to correct it? That gives us a view of what we call as control. There is a power, there needs to be a power that will correct or reform. And therefore, culture is situated with control.

By emphasizing improvement or correction, the concept of Sanskriti raises questions about who controls and manages culture. In the previous module that how culture becomes kind of hegemonic in nature. Right. But here in terms of managing and controlling, we see a different kind of control that is being discussed.

It is though situated in hegemony, but not the state hegemony, the political hegemony. We haven't reached up until that here. This can lead to the idea of cultural being used as a tool for control and imposing dominance. the idea of hegemony. But we don't see any opposition or resistance happening.

Whenever there is, when we talk about popular culture or culture, we see it is associated with resistance. It is associated with opposition, which is not happening. But we see that there is dominance and hegemony getting exercised. Very important to note. When we problematize the word Sanskriti or the meaning of culture, with that we come to popular culture.

What is the word that is popular in Hindi or the Indian context? What does it mean? The term here is Lok Priya, again another association with Lok and other discourse and difference in opinion erupts because of the term Lok.

Let us understand. In the Indian language, Lok Priya, which is liked by the public, seems straightforward for the word popular culture. But let us understand how it is situated. Loka, which also means Lok, is contested. often associated with folk.

Lok in Hindi again gets translated to folk. Folk, which means people, potentially, becomes a counter public to the official or normative. Normative is the hetero, discourse that we are talking about or the official one. And if we situate it in the Western discourse of popular culture, we see that folk is a different niche altogether earlier.

And if we consider Dwight, he says that it is a very organic entity on its own, which is folk. But again, he says that it is pure and it is more inclined towards the high art. And it is it cannot be construed in what we call as popular culture. But here we see when we say lok, which is people and folk also means people. Is it possible that both mean the same?

But no, that's not what is happening. We see that it's becoming a potential counter public to the normative, to the mainstream. Yet popular lends towards affirmation, not resistance. This is what I was talking about. The word popular is leaning towards affirmation rather than resistance.

How are we going to situate popular culture if there is no resistance, no opposition happening? Will the discourse on popular culture in India be very different from the popular culture that we have studied? , this is the issue and problem that Malhotra is talking about and if we go into the etymology, the problems are persistent because the meaning or the terminologies used or the translations of these words are not going to change ever, how are they going to locate? Of course, one reason or one analysis could be that the meaning of what

we call as popular, or the meaning of culture is evolving. That is one, answer to the issue and problem that can be solved. Tagging culture with change, with evolution, like the term itself is evolving. the term Lok Samskriti, which is popular culture. So we bring in Lok which is popular or Lok Priya, which is one term for people and, is liked by the public. And then we have popular culture, which is a complex concept. The word popular culture has become Lok Samskriti. When we are breaking down the terms and trying to understand the etymology where the problematization is happening, loka is potentially counter-public. We just talked about it.

And samskriti is didactic or corrective in nature. how are we going to address the tension? The term embodies the tension of being both counter-public and perspective. it is in a way becoming the opposite of what popular culture means in the Western discourse. One, it is becoming counter-public, which means it is talking about the high class.

It is talking about the elite class. It is talking about high art. And the other is it is becoming didactic. It is it has the power to control. It has the nature to control.

Again, it is setting itself in the dominant culture, the mainstream culture, the state or the government who has the power to control. these words bring us to a kind of questioning as to what is the answer to the problems and issues of studying popular culture in India. If we situate it in the Indian language. Moving on to the ontology of popular cultural studies, we know that India is a diverse cultural landscape, and this makes it challenging to define what Indian culture is or what popular could be otherwise. Because of the variety of ethnicity and, the variety of languages that India is made up of. It becomes difficult to situate popular cultural studies in India. Unlike the West, India lacks a clear distinction between high folk and mass culture due to colonial modernity's impact. If we talk about colonial modernity, which is a concept brought in by the colonial masters, we see that India never had a distinction between what is called high, what is called folk and what is called mass culture because of colonial modernity.

Whatever was not modern is the Indian tradition or Indian culture at large, which is an ensemble of the three. colonial modernity, in a way, whatever was Indian was considered to be traditional, which means it is situating the high, the folk,

and the mass culture together. where is the discourse going to start on popular culture? That is again another issue or the problem.

Colonial modernity often delegitimizes traditional forms, blurring lines between high and folk culture. The colonial masters thought that whatever the Indians practised, the culture and tradition could be termed or can be called low. OK, or maybe traditional. it is delegitimizing the traditional forms, blurring the lines between the high and the low.

if not low, the folk culture. in a way. The confusion is because of the colonial modernity. The term Indian culture carries political connotations associated with majoritarian tendencies and Hindutva forces. with the emergence of Hindutva nationalism which can be traced from the 1990s, we see that in a contemporary context.

Hindutva nationalism is becoming associated with nationalism altogether. Okay. Or Hindutva forces or Hindutva ideology is getting the same status as nationalism. you equate Hindutva to the nation. The definition of nationalism has changed from India being, under British rule, that idea of nationalism is very different from the idea of nationalism today. And therefore, these political connotations is not letting the Indian culture situate itself, in a place where it could be studied as a discipline. The majoritarian tendencies that have got associated with it are acting as a baggage or a hindrance for the Indian culture in a way.