

# INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

## Lecture7

### Implications of Cultural Studies in India

Implications of cultural studies in India. When we say implications of cultural studies in India, we talk about the multiplicity of cultures and the complications and how we will identify paradigm cultural texts as we will be, talking about the study of cultural studies or how or where cultural studies began. We will see how the emergence of CSCS Bangalore in the 1980s, precisely 1998, and the study of cultural studies emerged from there.

That was the first institution where cultural studies as an interdisciplinary course got established and looking at how they have tried to study the thematic or the thematization of Cultural studies is very interesting to see. taking cues from there, we can say that or we can answer that we do not need me master text. OK, though the question or the implication here is that because of the multiplicity of cultures, it complicates the to identify cultural text.

We don't don't need that. what CSCS suggests is that it suggests that everything that is around whether it is art whether it is cinema even in visuality whether it is any other codes everything can be called culture and everything can be a text on its own and further studied we can kind of answer this issue or problem through the study of thematization of cultural studies that CSCS is doing. Now, colonial modernity challenges the traditional tripartition of culture, making it difficult to define and resist mass culture. we already saw how colonial modernity has brought the masses, the folk and the high together. And this is in a way hindering with what we call as, the definition of popular culture or of what is called high and low or folk. makes it difficult to define and resist mass culture.

The idea of resistance anyway is not there in cultural studies in India, but al in popular cultural studies or popular culture in India. We just discussed that. this brings us to this issue and problem. Now, recent politicization by Hindutva forces adds another layer of complexity to understanding Indian culture. Now, the

Hindutva forces are making it a more complex of discourse because they are attaching their Hindutva ideologies to the discourse of the nation, to the discourse of Indianness, and to the discourse of nationalism.

Therefore, it is becoming a bit difficult to understand the Indian culture. And that all acts as a limitation, a problem and an issue as to what to call Indian culture, where to situate it. Any scholar who intends to study cultural studies in India or popular culture in India should be mindful of these challenges when engaging in popular culture studies in India. What to call popular? What to call high?

What to call low? And what to call folk and what are the other problems and issues that get attached to the study altogether. Now, the methodology, is very important. Methodology challenges in Indian popular culture. The third approach that Malhotra has discussed.

Now, cultural studies in India face methodological challenges, including mistrust of Western colonial epistemologies. The Western studies that have been done, especially on Indian culture, the methodology that they have used, doesn't sit well with Indian cultural studies. Therefore, this is not apt to be used to study cultural studies in India. The other is the adoption of imported epistemological problems considering the cultural context.

Can the adoption of epistemological problematic imported ones be used to study the cultural context in India? Is there a possibility? There again comes this question in methodology. Another challenge is anthropological and ethnographical approach raises questions about researcher's embeddedness within the culture being studied.

This again brings us to when we studied cultural studies and popular culture. We see that these schools often used a technique or methodology called participation observation. Or it is all another term used for it is outside in. It means that a person from another culture goes and studies that particular subculture and refrains from getting too much involved. And since he or she does not know about that culture, the analysis or the overview is quite concrete in those terms.

But when it comes to the anthropological and ethnographic study in India, The approaches raise questions because according to Malhotra, the researcher might

get embedded in the culture because the research is coming from that culture. That again is an issue and a problem in the methodology altogether. How the engagement should be, detachment, when they talk about one, should have merit of autonomy. They shouldn't get attached. This problem needs to be resolved. The other methodological challenge is socio-political analysis, while common may overlook nuances of cultural expressions and resistance. when we are talking about socio-political analysis, one might, especially an individual overlook the nuances of cultural expression and resistance. in what context? it can be situated or where it can be identified that is easy to miss that cannot happen because most often it is very generalized for people who are coming from there again could be seen as a challenge next, we have methodological approaches to Indian popular cultural studies

We saw the challenges and now let's read the approaches. the first approach says revisiting the cultural analysis method is essential in the Indian context. In order to formulate the methodologies to read or study Indian popular culture in academia or as a discipline in research, We need to revisit the methods of analysis first. Second, it says that sociopolitical analysis may need reassessment.

we just saw that sociopolitical analysis, can in a way, it does not ensure that there will be or not be any sort of resistance. this analysis may need reassessment. Considering formulations like dominance without hegemony by Ranajit Guha. Ranajit Guha has brought into perspective the dominance without hegemony. is it possible or can one locate it?

That is the question. Marxist cultural theorists offer perspectives on culture as a tool of resistance If we situate it in the Western context, we see that popular culture is a form of resistance. But its agency in India needs examination. We saw it to be very affirmative.

It is more like an affirmation that resistance and therefore using Marxist cultural theories to understand Indian popular culture might be a challenge. That is what it is referring to. Next, we have asked if popular culture in India be studied as a site of enjoyment. There is a question that needs to be again approached.

What challenges the pitfalls does this approach entail? Another set of challenges that it wants in the discussion or discourses what these pitfalls will be or the

approaches will entail, will lead to. Then we have moreover in the age of globalization where location itself is hardly a marker of rootedness, one cannot simply harp on colonial modernity but has to be more attendant towards current forms of imperialism and its impact on culture. Very important to note that all the discourses have been around in and around colonial modernity.

But as mentioned earlier, the assumptions about the study of cultural studies, we all tend to understand that. In this age of globalization, we cannot locate ourselves or keep ourselves rooted in simply one kind of culture or aspect, which is colonial modernity. In order to understand today's cultural studies, we need to move to the other forms or the current forms of imperialism and its impact on the culture. Newer forms of imperialism. How it is, challenging because it is no longer like like the ones where, the Britishers or the colonial masters, you to go and stay in that particular nation which they are ruling.

Now, imperialism is of a different nature altogether. The last approach is the ethical approach. According to this ethical approach or ethical consideration, we see that the ethical consideration in Indian popular culture studies needs more of reflection. And it is due to the diverse social structure. when we consider an institution, we see that it is very heterogeneous in nature.

People from across India come and study at that particular institute. However, the policies that revolve around social inclusion contradict each other. what, the cultural studies as a discipline read the policies of social inclusion or they should keep in mind the heterogeneity of the institution at large? that is quite interesting to dig deep and understand.

As it says it needs, ethical reflection. This is one ethical reflection that Malhotra talks about trying to acknowledge the student body, which is very heterogeneous in nature. This study often lacks independent disciplinary space and is viewed suspiciously within academia. Now, the discourse around popular culture in academia or popular culture studies in academia in institutions often says that it lacks independent disciplinary spaces because it is interdisciplinary. if you are approaching, a particular work or if you are conducting research, you cannot approach it from one discipline what it says is it needs to be interdisciplinary lack of independent disciplinary space is another ethics or ethical consideration that needs to be addressed in order to study what is called as cultural studies. The

ethics and relevance of it in Indian cultural studies. the question regarding legitimacy and relevance of popular cultural studies in India remains as a question. What is the legitimacy and relevance of popular culture studies in India?

it is often seen, especially nowadays, that many disciplines or departments are pushing in a way to find merit of relevance. Many of the mainstream disciplines are losing their charm and therefore they are pushing towards an interdisciplinarity. And that might be also a requirement. The current time, the contemporary time. And that brings us to the question of ethics and relevance.

Whether it is legitimate or whether it is relevant. It is merely a bid for relevance amidst a humanities legitimization crisis. the question is that humanities is going through a legitimization crisis. People often question what is humanities. Why is it different from, arts as a discipline or arts?

In other core institutions like central universities, they have a department of arts under which they construe streams and disciplines like history, English, geography, etc. But when we are talking about the humanities as a discipline that has emerged in basically technical institutions, their disciplines vary. They have, disciplines like public policy, they have economics, and financial economics. They have other organizational management, everything.

they are talking about relevance. And this relevance comes from following a certain kind of ethics and values. The ethical consideration includes the representation of Indian culture. the global academic machine and pursuit of cultural capital. When you are trying to consider it in an ethical way, you need to include the representation of Indian culture.

You also need to include the global academic machine, the global academia all you need to keep it in mind. And this is the view Or understanding of Malhotra. It cannot be said that it has not been critiqued or people have not argued against it. But this comes from a major point of.

inception. Looking at how cultural studies can be made possible or the study of cultural studies can be made possible in India. It already has started. But again, there are many questions. There are many issues and problems still persisting.

Then we have to address the ethical challenges that are essential for integrity and relevance. Now, you need to address these questions. We need to address these questions and ethics which is essential for the integrity of the discipline at large and all for its relevance. Otherwise, popular culture as a discourse, as a discipline, might not have that kind of integrity or relevance if the ethics are not in place if the relevance is not established.

After discussing popular cultural studies, in academia or how it can be situated, looking at the four approaches through etymology, ontology, methodology and ethics as to how popular culture should be studied in India or cultural studies at large should be studied in India with, the the relevance, questioning the relevance of the discipline and all answering to the relevance of the discipline at large is very important. From there, we move on to Sharmila Rege and Sharmila Rege talks about understanding popular culture. She locates it in Maharashtra through which she gives us an understanding of popular culture

Why locate it in Maharashtra or, the culture surrounding Maharashtra? It can become a discourse to analyze other cultures as well. One can locate the same, similar culture in this study that she has done in order to understand how popular culture works in the Indian scenario. It is kind of, in a way, a discourse on the tradition around Mela and how Mela is a discourse where we see the difference in caste and class. Basically, she is talking about the Ganesh Mela and Satya Shodak Mela.

Both of them are two different kinds of melas. We will go into the meaning of the terms that I will be using. Along with that, we will try to understand popular culture through Satya Shodak Mela and Ganesh Mela. There are three sites popular in Maharashtra that she locates.

And one of them is the Jalsa. It's a common term. And then we have Ganesh Mela and the Pune festival along with the timeline. The jalsa almost started towards the end of the 19th century. Then we have the Ganesh Mela, which started around the late 1950s.

And then we have the Pune festival almost towards the end of the 20th century. Each of these events is marked as popular. She calls all three, 'popular'. But the name as it suggests gives a different meaning. Jalsa it's a term that means a gathering and Mela is a fair and festival is a day or a period of celebration.

We see how the meanings are situated in such a way that all could be called as popular in the context of Maharashtra. Moving on, interrogating the popular in popular culture. What is popular and what is not popular? This discourse has been addressed previously.

And cultural studies in the post-colonial context can be situated to understand the engagement with the concept of modernity. again, modernity comes into play. Rege identifies three trends. One is a rejection of modernity, which is, given by Nandi. The other one is an interrogation of modernity.

And the third is the consumption of modernity. Interrogation of modernity is by Tejaswini Niranjana and the consumption of modernity by Appadurai. these are situated in the larger context. But in order to situate them, to make it easy and handy, It says that rejection of modernity is because of the dangers of modernity and because of its pre-coloniality.

How modern is situated in pre-coloniality and it is in contrast to the Indian culture. Therefore, it is seen as dangerous and therefore hence rejected. Now, when we say when we talk about interrogation of modernity, it can be said to contribute to the theorization of popular. Now, how we situate and theorize the popular, is interrogation of this modernity that is happening. And then lastly.

We see the consumption of modernity. It rejects the idea of 'popular'. , Arjun Appadurai kind of formulated ideas around consumption of modernity saying that it rejects the idea or the adjective of popular and replaces it with public culture. 'Popular', which got replaced and we got public culture because the word itself has been used in a very derogatory sense. the first ever Popular, term was used in Germany and it meant or it was designated to an uneducated people. you see where the idea of popular comes from. And it is al better to reject the meaning of popular and instead use public culture.

And with the usage of the word public culture, we understand the shifting of the labels, like how the meanings have changed with time. And that is very important when we are studying popular culture discourse. Now, the popular culture and the public, according to how Rege has situated it, she says that. There is any cial formation is seen to have at least three layers. One is the layer of unaffected practices and the other is Western modernity that we understood through colonial modernity al, which has been rejected.

The third is the layer of alternate alternative modernities. what are these alternative modernities? when we say layers of unaffected practices, we have examples like folk. which mostly remains the same. this is one example.

Western modernity, on the contrary, we know is associated with what we call as colonial modernity. And the third, which is the layer of alternative modernities, it says that the modernities get reinvented. Therefore, we can say that we have alternative modernities. They are in a way emancipating and imprinting at the same time.

This is what Rege's idea according to alternative modernities is. Now she brings in two forms. One is Ganesh Mela and the other is Satya Shodak Jalsa. Now Ganesh Mela was replaced by Satya Shodhak Jalsa.

Satya Shodhak Jalsa was replaced by Ganesh Mela. These two are celebrated across places like Maharashtra mostly and the Ganesh Mela has its inception from what we call as the Peshwa. the Peshwa's patron god was Lord Ganesh. And from there, we see the re-establishment of the Peshwa or we cannot say the reestablishment of the Peshwa, but the kind of culture that was followed during the Peshwa rule.

So was trying to, be re-established. And there again we see the coming of this Ganesh Mela. And Satya Shodak Mela basically is what we know as non-Brahmanical in nature. Whereas Ganesh Mela is associated with the Brahmins, most importantly with the Bahujans.

The discourse around these two and how they got integrated into each other is what we are trying to discuss the patron god of the Peshwas happened during the 1800s and the Satya Shodhak Jalsa, which is for the alternate people, is popular. It is the instructional theatre. It is also known as instructional theatre. Ganesh Mela is more inclined towards Hindu nationalism, whereas the Satya Shodhak Jalsa for non-Brahmin movement in Maharashtra, where we see the inception of Phule in the larger context of education reforms.

we see there is a different in caste, which brings us to the discourse of the Ganesh Mela and the Satya Shodhak Jalsa. Now we talk about the appropriation of cultural illustration and why the Ganesh Mela replaced the Satya Shodhak. There is a small history to it. There was a period where cholera, plague and



locust attacks on crops grew. And because of that, for 5 or 10 years, the Satya Shodhak leaders, they got displaced.

They were moving here and there. That led to the displacement of what we call as Ganesh Mela or Satya Shodhak Mela and was replaced by the Ganesh Mela. Ganesh Mela and filled with masses, with artificial patriotism and a scheme to reinstate Peshwai. That was the reason why the Satya Shodhak Mela was displaced in order to bring in artificial patriotism, all in the name of a scheme to reinstate Peshwai. There is thus a reason to believe that the space and form of the Jalsas are appropriated by Ganesh Melas something that was called Jalsa initially is now, kind of transformed into what we call as Mela. , there is a distinct caste and class difference between the two terms that are being used by Rege.

In this discourse further, we see that mela in form explicitly stated in caste terms as the Bahujans prefer such forms over lectures and kirtans. it comes to form and practice and content. According to Kesari, Mela is liked by people coming from a certain caste. But on the contrary, we see lectures and Kirtans attended by the Brahmins.

It all made sense or they are trying to devise meaning out of it that the Bahujans do not like the discourses around Kirtan or lecture. Instead, they like something called the Mela. Almost every Mandai, a Mandai is a small locale and in that locale, they have their own religious practices or a set of rules or traditions that they follow. And every Mandai had its own Mela. And since these Mandais themselves were caste-based, a clear-cut distinction arose between the Brahmin Melas and the Melas of the lower caste.

Even if later on when we see that it became Ganesh Mela from Satya Shodhak Jalsa, we see that the difference in these two Melas is quite evident and the difference is the caste-based difference. The Sanmitra Samaj and the Bharatmitra Samaj, both Brahmin mandais attended popularity and they were claiming it like awards and showing superiority in discipline and relay. And, as compared to the non-Brahmin melas. And then comes Chhatrapati Mela of the non-Brahmin versus Ganesh Mela. This Chhatrapati Mela, again the name, Chhatrapati was a warrior and Ganesh is seen or as worshipped as God. we see in the difference that the non-Brahmin are not adhering to a God but on the contrary, the Brahmins are adhering to a God and then we see that Chhatrapati

Mela began somewhere around the 1900s and it's a compilation. It is a mix of what we call Satya Shodhak and Ganesh Mela since it was replaced during the famine during the locusts. Therefore, we see again reinstating of Chhatrapati Mela is happening.

It was a public festival that was later made into a religious. Earlier it was only meant for the public, but later it transformed into a religion. Now there are reasons. There was an ongoing debate, as to the crudities of Chhatrapati Mela and it was questioned by the Brahmins. And the Brahmins said that it should be stopped because it is promoting vulgarness. It does not respect women. This kind of back-and-forth confrontation between the Chhatrapati Mela and the Ganesh Mela was going on and resulted in a consensus which said that This Mela should no longer be celebrated as just, as a public Mela or for the public.

Let us make it into a religious affair. And because of this religious affair. It led to, it being associated with other, classes or castes.

What is important and how it is a cultural site of resistance and coercion? We see that Satya Shodhak Mela itself was a site of resistance. It was in a way, it was a theatre initially transformed into a Jalsa and only the Bahujans or the non-Brahminical people used to attend and that was in a way seen as a site of resistance. And then later on, we see that it is being taken over by the Brahmins.

It was not something they call as reclaiming. There is no reclaiming happening. It is in a way displacement that took place. It is displacing the Satya Shodhak Jalsa and then claiming what is not theirs.

This is seen in terms of what we call as cultural sites. What do we call popular? Can Jalsa be termed as popular and Mela to be called as something high? Now, when you attach the meaning of religion to it, if not considering what is for the public, which is again people or the popular. The meaning of Chhatrapati Mela, did it change after it transformed into a religious Mela?

Did it get integrated into what is called as high culture or low culture? That is the question that needs me rt of addressing. And therefore, it becomes a site of coercion and resistance. Caste system also talks about the form of superiority that the Ganesh Mela was practicing. But the question was only revolving around the Chhatrapati Mela or the Satya Shodhak Mela. It was never around the

Ganesh Mela. But when the counterargument was happening between these two bodies, they said that they were making fun of the uneducated women of their own class.

That was one allegation against the Ganesh Mela people. we see there are arguments and counterarguments, which lead to a debate between the popular. both as Rege had initially situated the Jalsa, the Mela and the festival all, to be constituted as popular. And therefore, there is no sight of high or low, but there is coercion and resistance, which is very much evident there.

Finally, what happened to these festivals? What is the afterlife of these festivals? , viewing the Pune festival, we see that through the lenses of public culture or consumption of the new middle class, oversimplifying its significance, bordering on cultural populism. we see that the oversimplification of the public culture, which was earlier known as the popular, is happening or the discourse over the consumption of the middle class.

But that is not the case. It should not be this way. It is not as simple. It is very complex. The meaning of Popol itself is complex.

And when it is changed to public culture, it even complicates the complex further. Now, the Marathi literature, theatre, cinema and the devotional music industry reshaped the festival's popularity through the proliferation of Ganesh's imagery. again, iconography comes into play. That we'll be discussing later on and how the proliferation of Ganesh's imagery is taking place. And then there is reinvention through history is happening.

the Peshwa period was over. But through the celebration of Lord Ganesh, they are bringing in the reviving or grandeur of the Peshwa period by promoting Ashtavinayaka temples. when you visit these places, where the discourse of the popular is formulating, you see how they are bringing in the history through these temples and they have turned it into a site of production and consumption, the lucrative industry of devotional regional tourism.

It is not just in this period. Therefore, the discourse becomes interesting. It can be applied to other places where they are promoting, devotional regional tourism in other sites of, religious practices. Lastly, when we say globalization and identity, Pune's festival emerges as a tourist attraction, underscoring the

assertion of the changing Indian reality. is the Indian cultural reality still hinging upon what we call as religion or is it changing through the tourist attraction?

Again, that should be asserted and it should be put forward in order to question. Amidst global flux, emphasizing the need for politically engaged cultural studies. there is a lot of political engagement through this piece that we just studied that tries to engage us in the discourse of what is called popular. which revolves around caste and class, which ultimately makes it political in nature. Because we see how resistance works, how the dominant class works, which was with the high-class people who dethroned the Jalsa and took over with Ganesh Mela.