

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture8

Desire for Cultural Studies in India

Hello everyone. Today we will discuss the desire for popular culture studies or cultural studies in India. In academia, it is discussed and debated whether a discourse or a study in theoretical formulations of cultural studies in India, is possible? or what we understand as popular culture, can be implied in the Indian context? And is it ethically done?

Or is it even possible? So we're looking into the possibilities of the study of cultural studies in India, which will give us a thematic understanding of what we are trying to read through the popular culture discourses. We will be referring to two works, *The Desire for Cultural Studies* by Tejasvi Niranjana and the other one, *Cultural Studies and Politics in India Today* by Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay. How these two have situated and studied whether there is a possibility of Indian popular culture or cultural studies in India, studying the Indian culture. let us begin with the discussion of what we call as the desires for cultural studies. it seems that there is a relationship between cultural studies and institutions and is perhaps different in a foundational way in India. So looking into the desire for cultural studies in India, we see that the relationship between cultural studies and institutions perhaps is different in India as compared to other countries. So we discussed about the Chicago School. We discussed about Frankfurt School. We discussed about Birmingham School. And we see that cultural studies in all these three schools are situated differently.

So What kind of address do Indian institutions and the largest study of cultural studies in India require? We will look into it. So they say that there are two assumptions about cultural studies. So if we indulge in cultural studies in India.

We need to go through two assumptions. So one of the assumptions says that we need to, if we need to study cultural studies in India, we need to look into the past. We need to address the past engagements and only then it will be easy or

it will be possible to study cultural studies in India. And again, The earlier engagements that they are talking about, it could be the culture, it could be the folk, it could be the tradition, it could be the history, it could be everything.

So is there a possibility to do that? So that is one of the assumptions. And Tejaswini Niranjana has not contradicted. In fact, she just tells us about these assumptions. The second assumption is that the history of the emergence of cultural studies is tied to a crisis, which is nationalist discourse. So should we take into consideration what is called the nationalist discourse? And by this nationalist discourse, she is referring to the anti-colonial, freedom nationalist movement. So Should we take these things also into consideration while studying or bringing cultural studies to academia?

Without this, there is no possibility at all to have a study of cultural studies in India. It might sound a little, Puritanic in nature to go back to our history, to go back to the anti-colonial nationalism and situate it in contemporary times to study cultural studies in India. And then she talks about the relationship between and then a major preoccupation of nationalist institutions was the theorization of culture and The effort to assemble national cultural traditions.

What is this idea of national cultural traditions? Why are the terms national and culture being attached? So that is the major preoccupation of nationalist institutions that they try to attach national to the culture and therefore theorization of culture. But is it possible to again distinguish these two; national and culture and then study popular culture? So they are in a way tracing the genealogy of cultural studies in India. One evident fact in that tracing is the nation and culture. in India, we see that culture is seen as an antithesis of modernity.

So the modernity, the colonial modernity that India is of is an antithesis to our culture. And then culture becomes both a refuge and a weapon, solace and shield from the depredations of the kind of social change colonialism was bringing about. Through this modernity, the colonial modernity, and the change that it was bringing, culture was the weapon or the tool that, gave the Indians refuge, the solace and the shield. the trace of, again, the genealogy of cultural studies goes to the anti-modern aspect of culture, which is the Indian culture.

Our modernity, which includes the element of our specific cultural identity, again goes with national self-esteem. So in a way, national self-esteem is dictating our

modernity. So our modernity means it is a nationalistic discourse. And here Indians also drew on the works of British Orientalists to define what was truly Indian.

So they did not work on their own because of lack of scholarship, because maybe due to the Indian freedom movement, they adhered to British Orientalist writers. In the 80s and 70s, what happened was there was an emergence of critique of nationalism. with peasant and tribal movements, women's movements, and slightly later Dalit movement. So when we are trying to situate cultural studies, we need to look into the movements of the isms that came in.

And later on, it became a part of discourse. It was theorized and it became part and parcel of academia. So the 1880s, sorry, the 70s and the 18s saw the emergence of critique of nationalism with these movements. And then it, through its intellectual drive, converted itself into subaltern studies.

So Dalit movement basically more of or tribal movement also be construed under subaltern studies. Then the women's movement under feminist scholarship. Again, Dalit critiques or Dalit studies emerged as a separate entity to study the politics around Dalits. And therefore, we see that it started to integrate Cultural studies through these formats.

The immediate history of cultural studies is to be derived from this broad critique. So the critique that we just discussed in a way presents to us how cultural studies typically could be conceived or how in history it can be traced. And then comes a crisis in disciplines. When we are talking about this crisis in disciplines, what are these disciplines? The crisis that they are referring to. So what happened with economics and sociology was that after independence, they were the key disciplines in promoting the development of the country. We saw the Nehruvian socialism, the five-year plans, which are based basically on economics and sociology. And therefore, it was. about theory building and modelling so economics at that time was deep down in theory building and also modelling but what C.T. Kurian, the economist, has to say about it is that the kind of economics that India needed at that time was more about the social relationships. Therefore, these disciplines went into crisis, some sort of crisis, because they were not modelled according to the Indian culture, and the Indian

people. Therefore, we see the crisis in other disciplines also happening along with economics, there is sociology, history and literary studies. ,

As a take on the inception, so one take was by Tejaswini Niranjana where she brings in the inception from the studies and also from the broad critique of the social movements situating culture and nation together, how it has been interpreted. It's not that she is saying, but she has kind of done the research in order to figure out how it has been brought into context. And moving on from Tejaswini Niranjana to Bhaskar Mukhopadhyay, where he locates the inception. So he locates the inception of the Journal of Arts and Ideas in the early 1880s as the beginning of cultural studies in India.

So it is seen as a signpost of inception. And then It is aligned with the mainstream left. So most of the earlier, leaders in India were of the left bent. And having said that, it is informed by the Western Marxism.

This journal's agenda was to re-examine India's modernism and popular culture. So having said that, the inception seen in the Journal of Art and Ideas in the early 1980s, we see that it has a mainstream left kind of bent. And therefore, we see that it talked about Western Marxism and its agenda was to re-examine Indian modernism and popular culture, which is again, in a way, situated not... Towards the right, but of course, towards the left, more than Western Marxism, it was during emergency. So during the emergency, Mrs. Gandhi brought in the idea that it was the last stage of leftist politics in a way. And it says that the utopian Gandhian political spirituality was crumbling. And so was the leftist politics. And it necessitated the emergence of cultural studies here. So the necessity that erupted is seen in this phase of development, emergency where everything that is left is crumbling. The leftist intervention in culture that we see comes from what we call the IPTA, which is the Indian People's Theatre Association that was established to fight fascism in the 1940s. , when we talk about leftist intervention of culture and formulating this body or institution, In a way, it can be seen as the culture that is trying to control. , in the previous lecture where we discussed about culture being, not natural and culture is seen as a corrective reform, a reformation tool, which means that it is getting some sort of power to control.

And from there, if you see culture again is a way out. through which the government or the state could control through the body of IPTA. The thrust was

on fashioning a progressive secular Indian modernism by incorporating elements from vernacular modernism and folk tradition. So what happens in the larger body of art, they kind of combine modernism with the old.

So folk brought in folk and vernacular modernisms into the progressive secular Indian modernism. to formulate a new kind of modernism or new kind of culture. And this was happening through IPTA. The IPTA's agenda, we knew was to fight fascism. But after independence, states' intervention in culture during the 1950s, was seen through IPTA and we see the heroic phase of Nehruvian socialism also emerging from there from IPTA and then the range of centralized cultural institutions were established to act as a nuclei of what Nehru was trying to do so Nehru was trying to control the state through culture And therefore, developing these kind of centralized cultural institutions in a way, it could be seen like that. And therefore, it was a Nehruvian policy to institutionalize and governmentalize culture by building various academies. So various academies came into existence in this phase. The academies in India that were that were formulated were modelled on the French Academy and the National School of Drama which we call NSD was cloned in the model of British Rada. So taking inspiration from the French and the British, what Nehru does is it is formulating or institutionalizing culture in a way, bringing it under the control of the government. And then there is a declaration of emergency happening by Mrs. Gandhi, which was the last ditch, effort to bolster hegemony or the Nehruvian ideology of nation-state by repressive means. So we know Althusser's concept of Ideological state Apparatus, which is ISA and RSA repressive state apparatus being implemented through Mrs. Gandhi and the device that she chooses is emergency.

And then Mukhopadhyay says further that the emergence of television and what we call Bollywood, which we will discuss in other modules, also became a way to direct, a way to implement, a way to enforce culture. So When we discuss films in visual narratives, we'll see how Dilip Kumar became the Nehruvian hero. He was often called as the five-year plan hero. His films talk about the five-year agricultural plans and the plans regarding the military.

So we see how Bollywood also in a way was promoting culture through a censored way or It could be quote-unquote called propaganda films of Nehruvian socialism. The parent institutions of these bodies, we saw the emergence of academies coming into existence. These academies, which were, modelled on

the French Academy and National School of Drama came from the British Rada and had, in a way given rise to other institutions that came after.

The parent institutions that we are discussing are not limited to only culture, but we see the influences of the influence of technology and management also coming into place in the 1950s and early 1960s when the key educational institutions and the statutory bodies for regulating higher education were set up. UGC is one of them. The autonomous body was formed under the Act of Parliament of 1956. So we see the establishment of UGC happening in the year 1956.

Again, giving evidence. like making another institution to control the culture or art. Main institutions dealing with arts were also set up. One was Sangeet Natak Academy, 1953. The other one was Sahitya Academy 1954 and the third was Lalit Kala Academy 1954.

these later on transformed into what we call as the National School of Drama. One of them was earlier known by a different name and again they formulated and changed. So the training institutions that we discussed, Sangeet Natak Academy became the National School of Drama. So Sangeet Natak Academy came in 1953 and it got its new name in 1959. Then Ministry of Information and Broadcasting became the FII in 1960.

Later on, it became FII. renamed in 1974 as the Film and Television Institute of India, which is FDII, situated in Pune. And Department of Science and Technology became the National Institute of Design in 1961. So we see the emergence of various disciplines coming into existence, state control over all these bodies. As I mentioned, science, technology and management, all of them evolved.

We see the coming of UGC. We see the coming or establishment of other institutes where art could be studied. There came development aid from the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union at that time was a very good friend of India the United States and also West Germany to set up Indian Institutes of Technology. The Act of 1961.

through that, what we call IITs were formed. And then the first management institutions of business schools were set up in 1961. The first two centres were

Ahmedabad and Calcutta, which we call as IIMs or Indian Institute of Management. Separation of skill-based learning from general education.

We know that these are basically the ones taught in technical institutions that are skill-based. And there should be a different set of learning for general education, like normal graduate-level programs, which are not skill-based like English, geography, history, sociology, etc., Even with general education, the report of the University Commission proposed a separation of disciplines. So even under general education, the University Grants Commission or the UGC proposed that they should be divided into disciplines.

And that is what happened Later on, as we see other institutes like the central universities all have various different departments that cater to various different disciplines. The cultural studies as a discipline, we saw how general education and art became a tool, and then we looked into The emergence of technological and management institutions and also science where cultural studies as a discipline in India first started and how it moved, how it manoeuvred in a way is very important.

Cultural studies evolved within the context of the Indian education system as an interdisciplinary field. cultural studies, people coming from sociology, people coming from history, and English could study cultural studies because it was seen as an interdisciplinary subject or a field. And therefore, this is how cultural studies in India seem to have evolved. And then,

We see the older formulations about the place of culture with specific disciplinary histories. The older formulations, coming into place and also specific disciplinary histories situating themselves in cultural studies, even though it came up as interdisciplinary. Then we see cultural studies today discard the Nehruvian nationalist enterprise drawing from oriental description of difference. , cultural studies, as we mentioned, was like assumed that if cultural studies as a discipline emerged, the two assumptions that we discussed could be very well true. And

If we do not want to situate these assumptions, which one is bringing back the past and history and the second bringing back the idea of nation nationalism, which was like the anti-colonial one? We also here see that in contemporary times, they are discarding the Nehruvian nationalist enterprise, which is like the development of the nation or the modern idea of a modern nation drawing from

an orientalist description of difference. So the British orientalist writers also they looked into as to find out what was true Indian. So they are discarding it outrightly and they also challenge the separation between culture and modernity.

So accordingly, what cultural studies as a discipline wants. They want to bring in together the idea of culture and modernity, which in India had not been possible. Modernity was seen as a colonial term, as a colonial aspect, and because of this it was not possible to bring these two together. But cultural studies is of a different view.

Cultural studies say that no, to understand and situate In academia, it is important to challenge the separation between the two to understand better. , cultural studies has also interrogated the disciplinary frameworks. For example, literary studies, English, history, sociology and anthropology. in which culture was embedded.

Where do you situate culture? In which disciplines? the disciplines mentioned right are the ones where you can situate the culture. for example, if you are reading a novel, the novel belongs to the Victorian age, you also learn about the Victorian age as in what was going around at that time.

What was the condition of England in the Victorian age? So it just does not tell you the story of the protagonist and the family, the immediate family, neighborhood, etc. But it tells a lot about the age, and the culture, right? therefore, culture is embedded in disciplines like English and then, of course, literary studies. History as well.

So history, when we read about the history of a certain age, it tells us about the culture. It just does not tell us about how many wars that period witnessed or which king dethroned the other. But it tells about the age. It tells about the culture. Similarly, sociology and anthropology also tell us about the culture.

They are even more drawn. They are like taking in the firsthand experience of the culture. And therefore, it is embedded and questioned the absence of cultural disciplines such as economics and political science. In cultural studies, we do not see the presence of economics and political science. But as a discipline, we need to interrogate and question why economics and political science are not part and parcel of cultural studies.

Maybe in times to come, it may get inculcated in the larger study of cultural studies in India but as of it needs further digging and questioning cultural studies initiatives similar to the study of subcultures in the Chicago school The Birmingham School, which started its cultural studies department, the Frankfurt School, the Atlanta School, all these schools which largely studied various different cultures, subcultures, countercultures. India also set its foot in this area to initiate cultural studies. The first such center was established in 1998 in Bangalore called Center for Study of Culture and Society.

It's called CSCS. It took a few years and it happened only in March 2001 that this CSCS started a PhD program in interdisciplinary cultural studies the first of its kind during that time. This was a period where we were, talking about the mainstream disciplines and not looking into the idea or, the inception of cultural studies as a discipline. And this was the first institution that did that.

The pedagogical interventions happened in two stages or two levels. The first constitutes the recognition and teaching of the field its achievement and its landmark. And then it situates and says that the lack of key text produced as much as in India and elsewhere will also be into consideration, even if it is less in number. And most of the leading publishers like Oxford and Sage use cultural studies as a library classification category.

Usage of local text as well. When we are looking at the pedagogical intervention of cultural studies, we cannot leave out the local texts. We have to include everything. The field is very expansive.

It is, of course, looking at the key text, but the key text could be very mainstream. But without the inclusion of the local text, it is highly impossible to understand what cultural studies are, especially if you're doing the study in India. The second level of pedagogical intervention that it mentions is the more difficult contemporary process into which the CACS ventured was thematizing culture as a possible field of inquiry of course, we have seen with time that the thematization of culture, culture has immense potential.

But making or giving in an attempt or making it a field of inquiry was the first and most important thing that, Center for Study of Cultural and Society did. By thematizing culture as a possible field of inquiry, it says that to take a few examples of such fields visually, how visual forms inhabit our lives would become

an object of inquiry that both included and went beyond specific forms like painting, cinema or architecture, asking instead how these might relate to each other. Thematizing culture as a possible field of inquiry is important because it integrates visibility earlier it was mostly paintings it was cinema or it was architecture but all the forms coming together and making it in a way a thematic study is what this center is trying to do

We also see that when it is trying to, talk about the thematization, it looks at the possibility that there is no master text. But they say that it is OK. It's not necessary to have a master text. We can use the local text as well to study cultural studies. And second, it says that culture itself is the text.

So whatever we see, the landmarks, the achievements, the landscapes, the people, the dress they wear, the tradition they practice, everything is acting as a text. That is what they are trying to do. The domain could be even politics, ethics, science, etc., And this approach is to broaden the scope of cultural studies beyond text. So the functioning or the thematization of culture in this that is being done by CSCS includes all these aspects, the key text, which can be anything, not necessarily a master key text, or a master text as we see in, in the Western study of cultural studies. So in the Western study of cultural studies, there are many writers, authors and scholars who have theorized certain elements of cultural studies and also popular culture. But in India, because of the multi-ethnicity and the linguistic diversity, CS is trying to open. It is not trying to limit.

And this might help in ways where we will be able to situate the desire for Indian popular culture. It still needs to go further in order to call something as Indian cultural studies or Indian popular culture.