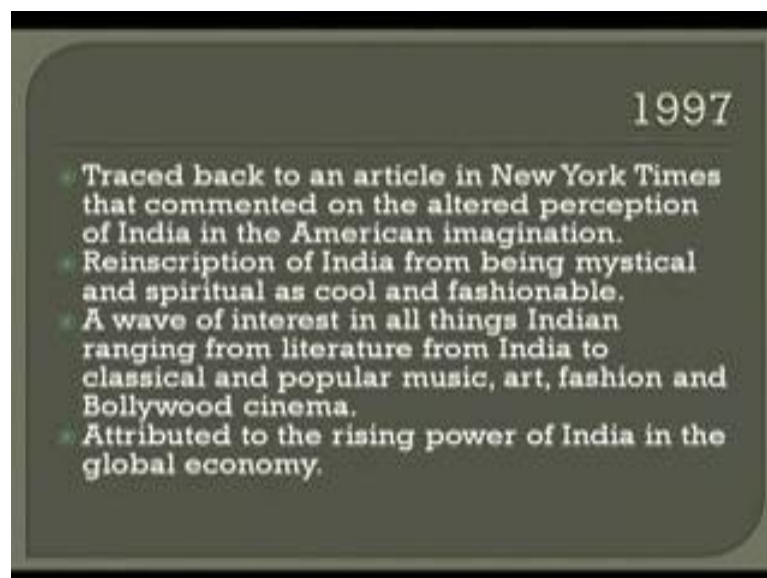


Globalization and Culture
Prof. Anjali Gera Roy
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

Lecture - 31
The Birth of Indo-Chic

Speaking about new orientalism, which we spoke about in the previous module, let us move on to the next module, and talk about how neo orientalism manifests itself, or reappears in the 1990s, with reference to the emergence of a phenomena that has been named indo-chic. What is Indo-Chic? And when did these phenomena of the Indo-Chic emerge. Let us trace the history of Indo-Chic, the emergence of the history of Indo-Chic in the west, and let us look at different aspects of the Indo-Chic that emerged in the 1990s.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:08)



Indo-Chic, the history of the origin of Indo-Chic is traced back to an article, in New York Times in 1997, that commented on the altered perception of India and American imaginary, re-inscription of India, we said that India was imagined as spiritual and mystical, and now we are saying that from being spiritual and mystical as it was imagined it in the 60s, to the representations of India in the 60s, there is a complete

transformation in the image of India as its re-inscribed as cool, instead of mystical and spiritual, India is now seen as cool and fashionable.

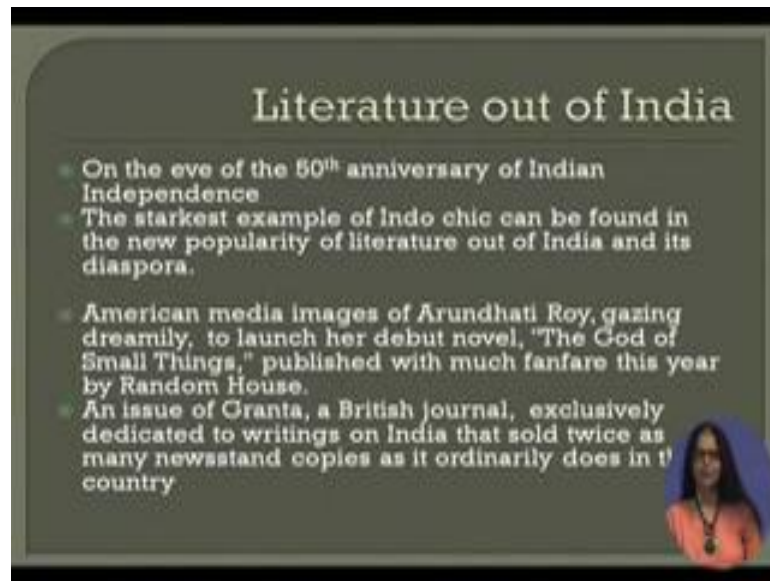
A wave of interests in all things Indian, ranging from literature from India to classical, and popular music, art, fashion, Bollywood cinema, is attributed to the rising power of India in the global economy. So the reasons for the emergence of Indo-Chic this time around, as supposed to be 60s, are economic rather than social and cultural, more economic and cultural.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:30)



Another article, the same article, in New York Times, which is title Beyond Yoga Curry, Nehru jackets into film publishing and body painting, says that ever since the Beetles popularized Hinduism and Nehru jackets in the late 60s, Indian cultural artifacts have had a vague currency in American imagination, but lately India and its inhabitants are indisputably chic.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:08)



First of all we begin with literature. The, on the fiftieth, this happened twenty years ago, a the fifty on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, the emergence of a phenomena call Indo-Chic, and the, the phenomena which first the emergence in literature, the starkest example of Indo-Chic can be found in the new popularity of literature art of India and its Diaspora. American media images of, and the pinup girl of Indo-Chic, and American media is novelist, Aruandothi Roy.

Images of Arundothi Roy gazing dreamily to launch her debut novel, The God of Small Things, things, published by much fanfare in 1997, by Random House, an issue of Granta, a British journal, similarly exclusively dedicated to writings in India, that sold twice as many news stand copies, as it ordinarily does in the country. So, we talking about emergence of Indo-Chic, and this Indo-Chic wave appears to be, have, have been ushered in by the fad for Indian writing in English, and the mascot for this phenomena, the emergence of, of this phenomena, is the extremely intelligent and photogenic, Indian novelist Arundhati Roy.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:40)



But its not just the appeal of the high brow literature of Indian writers in English, but also the appeal of the kitsch, the kitsch appeal of Bollywood cinema, Bombay is flourishing movie industry, the craze among American teenagers, for the ancient Indian art of body painting known as mehndi or henna, which is now sold in do-it- yourself kits at urban outfitters. So, the article continues and this way in it says the Indo-Chic seems to be everywhere.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:14)



Art

- Indo chic seems to be everywhere. In the art world, several high-profile exhibitions of Indian art have opened recently in museums from New York to Washington to San Francisco. And the Asia Society in Manhattan, which has long promoted the arts of the subcontinent, has witnessed a surge of interest in tours to India by its high-end donors.

In the art world several high profile exhibitions of Indian art, have opened recently from museums from New York to Washington to San Francisco. And the Asia society in Manhattan, which is long promoted the arts of the sub-continent, has witnessed a surge of interest in tours to India by its high-end donors.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:45)



Music

- Increased attendance at concerts, driven partly by the crossover success of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the Pakistani qawwal
- Penetration of the British-Asian musical punch Bhangra among the Manhattan multi-culti set

Music, increase, increase it also notes increase attendance at concerts driven partly by the crossover success of the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, the Pakistani qawwal, who we met in the module in the unit, on world music and the emergence of Qawwali. Penetration of the British Asian musician punch Bhangra, among the Manhattan multi cult, multi culti set. So, this article in New York times heralds the emergence of Indo-Chic in the US, heralded by the, by the recognition given to Indo Indian writers, Indo English writers, led music, Indian fashions, the whole lot art of henna, and the wearing of bindies, a taste for Indian art, a taste for Indian music, and so on.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:53)



The last factor, that she mentions the New York, the author of the New York article mentions, is the emergence of crossover, or the Diaspora film, or films made by, film makers of Indian origin, such as Deepa Mehta, Mira Nair, Gurundra Chanda, and so on, which are now being, first of all there is distribution of old Bollywood classics, in mainstream nation retail outlet us like blockbuster video. Secondly, more English language films directed by Indians are being released in the United States. Sight, sight guys films were sufficiently impressed by the popularity of Mera Nairs film Kamasutra, to distribute Fire, another English language film, which about two Indian housewives.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:53)

Difference between the 1960s and 1990s Fad

- Although American interest in India dates back to the 1960s
- Many Americans regarded India as a place of snake charmers and sage swamis, as a destination for an entire generation of flower children
- But today's Indo chic is fed by another set of desires
- "It is a different kind of moment of cultural appropriation than in the 60's"
- Nicholas Dirks, an India specialist who directs the Columbia University anthropology department



So, but we must be very clear, that there is a big difference in this wave, Indian wave of the 90s, and the earlier Indian wave such those in a 1920s, in the 1960s. There is a huge difference in its new Indo-Chic, and what is the difference? Although medical interests in India dates back to the 1960s, many Americans regarded India as a place of snake charmers and sage swamis, as a destination for an entire generation of flower children, but present Indo-Chic is fed by another set of desires, and as Nicholas Kirkwood said, he is the India specialist, India specialist, redirects the Columbia university anthropology, anthropology department, he says, that its a different kind of moment of cultural appropriation, than in the 60s. So, in the 60s we saw that a crisis in European identity, or an American identity, ah, and innovated American or European civilization, turn to the East in order to search for peace, in order to search for meaningless in there own materialistic life, the new desire for the East is altogether different, from the earlier desire for the East.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:24)



Now, this arrival of Indo-Chic in UK, is an, a, is earlier when we spoke about the emergence of Bhangra. So, we try to, I am trying to connect these various waves, India Indo-Chic waves, in the US as well as in UK, and it seems to have started at the same time as in US, when with the emergence of Indian Asian underground, when musicians of Indian origin like Talvin Singh, Tabla percussionist, finds a following in the mainstream, which is very different from the earlier emergence of Bhangra, and it is the, the desire to mainstream Bhangra by Bhangra practitioners, which did not quite succeed at that time, but by the 90s, the emergence of Asian background, Asian underground, found any takers among white youth, and here is a white friend, who speaks about entering the club night in Asian underground.

She describes her experience “a bindi was stuck on my head, and blue and gold glitter sprinkled around my eyes, my blond hair stuck to my sweat, thin bangles clanged on my wrists, and I danced to the music. I was at the Blue Note in Hoxton East London, the club night was Anokha, it was 1996, and I had just graduated. The first time I went, then, the then, relatively unknown DJ, Talvin Singh, sporting dyed blue hair, was pumping out thumping Table and Sitar, he used with dance and drum and bass. Audio visual projection of Indian street stalls and rickshawalas were projected onto the walls. Hindi and pop and classical music fused with western sounds, pumped out of the speakers, and girls queued

up to have henna done. Energy levels were high for a Monday night in misty grey London, and I loved it.

It made a change from the druggie rave scene and the Indian music and visuals added an exoticism, I found appealing in London's clubs, having backed packed round South Asia at the age of 19, I kept going back, because I felt like I had finally discovered my own music scene. A crowd that was 80 percent white 20 percent Asian, as different from the Bhangra crowd. Creative professionals not hippies, there is also difference in the class composition of the club scene here, the clientele who visit Anokha nights, are creative professionals there are not hippies, who are fed up of western civilization, daring enough to dance to Hindi music, film music, fused with reggae, dance, club and drum n bass.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:38)



Now, at the same time, soon after the appearance of the New York, the Times article, we have in academic, Suna, Sunaina Maira, who has done a amazing amount of work on this phenomena of Indo-Chic, and in her article, she is speaks about India is in these days, she is talking with the 90s, late 90s; appearing on the style map of trend spotters in fashion, and music. In the late 1990s, in the US and Europe, India is in, India is chic, India is no longer spiritual mystical, India is cool and hip. This turn of the, turn of millennium fascination has produced the new, a new oriantilization of India, as I said

earlier, that this new form of orientalizing, that creates, recreates counter cultural appropriation of Indian styles from 30 years ago, through the consumption of imported goods that signify the exotic cool.

So, it is a recycling of the 60s counter culture, but it is a very, this chic cycling is put were very different you use, it is a very different phenomena from the 60s phenomena. In its February 20, 2000 issue New York Times magazine, fashions of the time open to a double page advertisement for Liz Claiborne, featuring a blonde model in a silk sarong, made from a golden bordered pink sari, and spotting a henna design on her foot. The caption reads, let the sun shine in, a 60s innocence oozes of the image of the bare footed white woman in a red barn like room, the chiffon curtain billowing languorously in the window.

So, we have a again, a appropriation of the hippie movement, which for good or bad was a genuine movement, which emerged from below, which emerged from the youth, the youth disillusion with (Refer Time: 15:02) and materialism, and we find that these trends which became fashionable during the 60s, are now appropriate it in the 90s, as high fashion. So, that it sense, or that kind of closeness to, to nature which, which the 60s image connotes, is appropriated in Udh Kutwar, Hippie dump means Udh Kutwar, with appropriation of Indian fabrics and motifs, by American and European fashion houses and multinational design companies.

The Macys store in New York, devoted its entire window display of Indo, Indo-Chic in July 2000, with giant television screens is running clips from Bollywood Hindi films, to the amazement of the passerby on Broadway, treated to this industry fashion trends, as street spectacle. So, I did talk about Bollywood fashions, when I talked about Bollywood media sunglasses, I will not going to Bollywood fashions again, because there is a, there is a intersection of the craze for Bollywood in the west, which, which is (Refer Time: 16:27) with the emergence of co- Indo-Chic, but in Bollywood fashions only want one, one small part of Indo-Chic, which is not entirely equal to Bollywood, its more than that.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:39)



Now, Mint, Maira places it in the mid to late 90s, and she defines Indo-Chic or Asian cool more generally as, not just a contemporary style phenomenon, because when we think of chic, we think of fashionable, which she is not only talking about the style phenomenon. Having been most recently popular rise in the US, by the hippie cult of the 60s, she makes it very clear that it's not a making a comeback, the hippie cool, hippie chic is not making a comeback. But today it exemplifies a different set of historical conjunctures and social anxieties, very different social anxieties from the time of the 60s, and the desire for peace, the disillusionment with war, and disillusionment with materialism. So, different set of social anxieties, which set in the trend for Indo-Chic in the 1990s and Maira, sees it as a particular late capitalist orientalism. Now, how is the late capitalist orientalism? Neo orientalism, different from earlier forms of orientalism say in the 20s, and in the 60s.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:02)



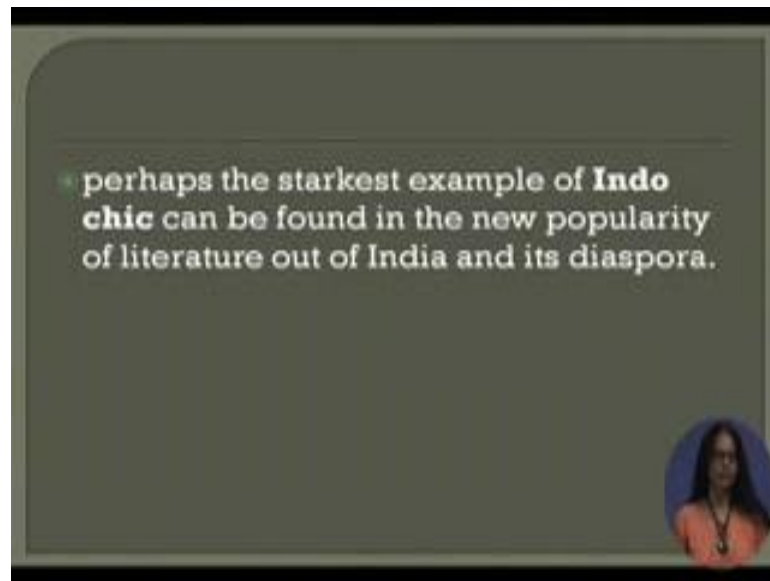
Another newspaper the activist reports, cheesy 70s action flicks set in Bombay, and other ex[otic] exotic locales, replete with sitar heavy soundtracks, flash across correctly TV screens, in the dingy Indian restaurant, scattered along East Houston in New York city. So, the kitsch appeal of an album, comprised of soundtrack gems, from the golden age of those brownspotation Bollywood films is undeniable. This is Kendra Marley; Kendra goes on to mistakenly cold Hindu diety Ganesh, Dinesh, to make a somewhat, somewhat obscure reference to the cultural capital, Bombay, the Hard Way offers its consumers.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:59)



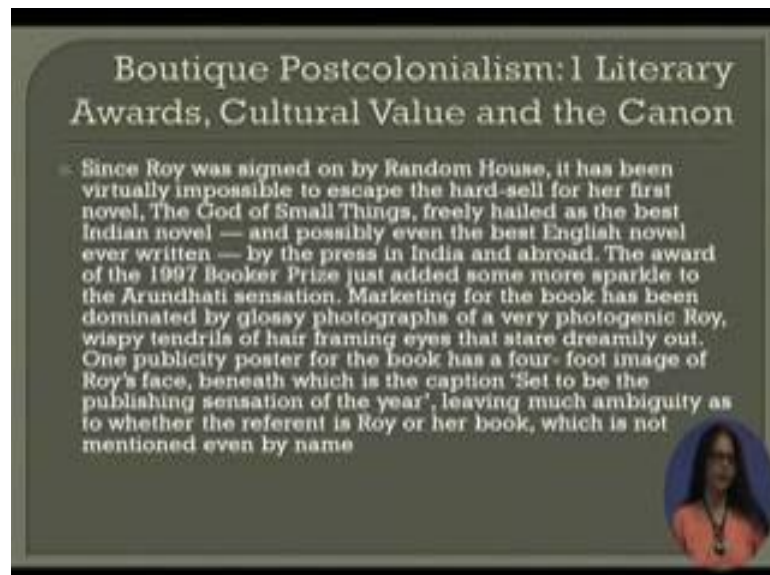
Now this emergence of, since the late 90s, fashions, yoga, and other cool and commodifiable difference, at the same time, this takes place at the same time, that Asian south Asian bodies are increasingly rendered suspect, by the mechanisms of xenophobic nationalism, specially targeted against South Asians, say, Anitha Mannur and Piya Saini. So, we are only of a, ah, decade away from, a four years away from 9/11, and xenophobia and islamophobia, which scenes to co-exist with the consumption of Indian, Indian, all things Indian.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:46)



Perhaps the starkest example of Indo-Chic can be found in the new popularity of literature and it is Diaspora.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:55)

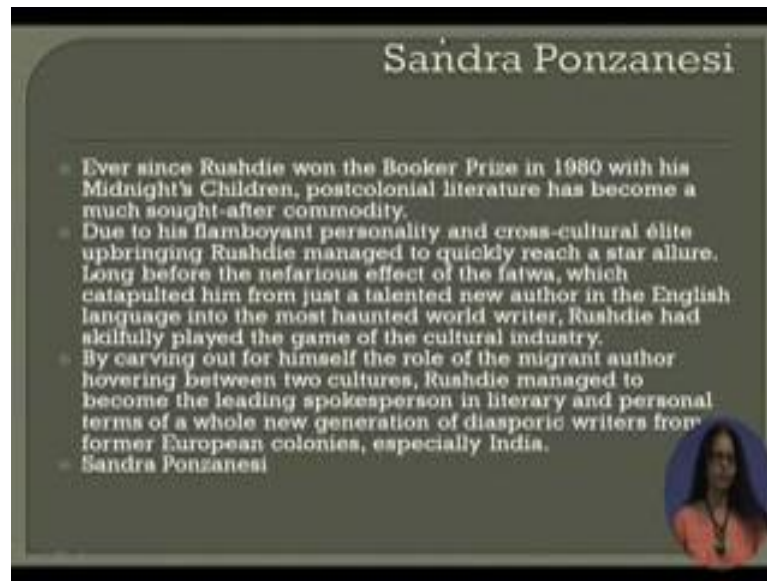


So, let us look at boutique post-colonialism, literary awards, cultural value and the canon. And begin with Arundhati Roy, since Arundhati Roy was signed on by Random

House, its virtually impossible, says writer, to escape the hard sell for her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, freely hailed as a best Indian novel, and possibly even the best English novel ever written by the press in India and abroad. The award of the 1997 Booker prize just added more sparkle to the Arundhati sensation. Marketing for the book has been dominated by the, by glossy photographs of a photogenic, very photogenic Roy, wispy tendrils of hair framing eyes that stare dreamily out. One publicity poster for the book has a four foot image of Roys face, beneath which is the caption, said to be the publishing sensation of the year, leaving much ambiguity as to whether the reference is Roy, or her book which is not mentioned, even by name.

So, here we have the marketing of Indian fiction, ah, not with standing the talent of the writers ushering the era, the hard mark, the hard selling of Indian fiction, through the packaging itself, to the repackaging of the writer, the author, lay, you, you know, this Arundhati Roy easily fell into this trap, through, through being repackaged as an exotic Indian, through her exotic Indian looks, and the way she was made to dress, resplendent in diamonds and Kanchipuram silks, she used to visit her book openings, even though in everyday life she does not, she is not a very traditional she does not dress in traditional Indian clothes, she does that to package to, to promote her books overseas, and that formula of poke packaging her writing, through the packaging of the author herself as an exotic Indian women, sold the, created market for Indian writing in English overseas, a kind of writing, which to some extent exoticized India, and also indulged in its (Refer Time: 22:34) exoticization.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:34)

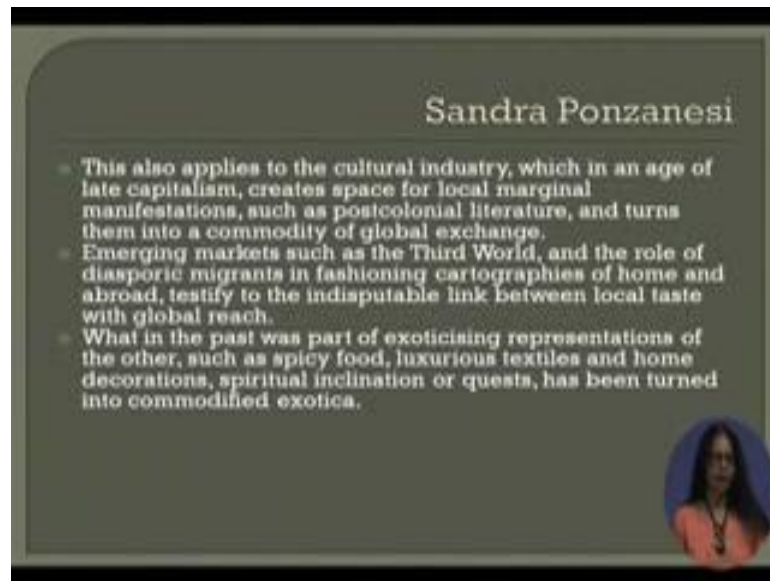


Sandra Ponzanesi

- Ever since Rushdie won the Booker Prize in 1980 with his *Midnight's Children*, postcolonial literature has become a much sought-after commodity.
- Due to his flamboyant personality and cross-cultural elite upbringing Rushdie managed to quickly reach a star allure. Long before the nefarious effect of the fatwa, which catapulted him from just a talented new author in the English language into the most haunted world writer, Rushdie had skillfully played the game of the cultural industry.
- By carving out for himself the role of the migrant author hovering between two cultures, Rushdie managed to become the leading spokesperson in literary and personal terms of a whole new generation of diasporic writers from former European colonies, especially India.
- Sandra Ponzanesi

Sandra Ponzanesi said, ever since Rushdie won the booker prize, so this phenomenal started even earlier, when he Rushdie won the booker prize in eighty with his *Midnight's Children*, postcolonial literature has become a very sought after commodity. Now Rushdie also is a very media savvy person, and who easily lends himself to this packaging of the East as exotic, due to his flamboyant personality, and cross culture cultural elite upbringing, Rushdie managed to quickly reach a star allure, long before the notorious, nefarious effect of the fatwa, which catapulted him from a talented new author in the English language, into the most haunted world writer, Rushdie had skillfully played the game of the cultural industry. By carving out for himself the role of the migrant author, hovering between two cultures, Rushdie manage to become the leading spokesperson in literary and personal terms, of a whole new generation of diasporic writers, from the former of European colonies, specially India.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:52)



And this also applies to the entire cultural industry, in the age of late capitalism, which creates space for local marginal manifestations, such as postcolonial literature, and turns them into a commodity of global exchange. So, this commodification of Indian cultural products, music, painting, arts, fashions, or even rituals, as commodities of global change is what differentiates this new fad for India, in the west, from the early fads.

Emerging markets such as a third world and the role of diasporic migrants in fashion in cartographic of home and abroad testify, to this indisputable link between localities within global reach. What in the past was art of exoticizing representations of the other, such as spicy food, luxurious textiles, and home decorations, spiritual inclinations or quests, has been turned into commodified exotica.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:03)

Fetishizing the Orient

- The Orient becomes a fetish, a series of objects to be desired in order to inflect the anonymity of the global style with a colour locale.
- The list of what is now available is not properly exhausted by such obvious examples as the worldwide poliferation of ethnic food, clothing, world music or the so called new-age industry, all commercial and global responses to local traditions and heritages.

Sandra Ponzanesi



So, the orient has become a fetish. The series of object to be desired, in order to inflect the anon, anonymity of the global style with the color, locale; the list of what is now available is not properly exhausted by such obvious examples, as a worldwide proliferation, of ethnic food, clothing, world music for the social new age industry, all commercial and global responses to local traditions and heritages.

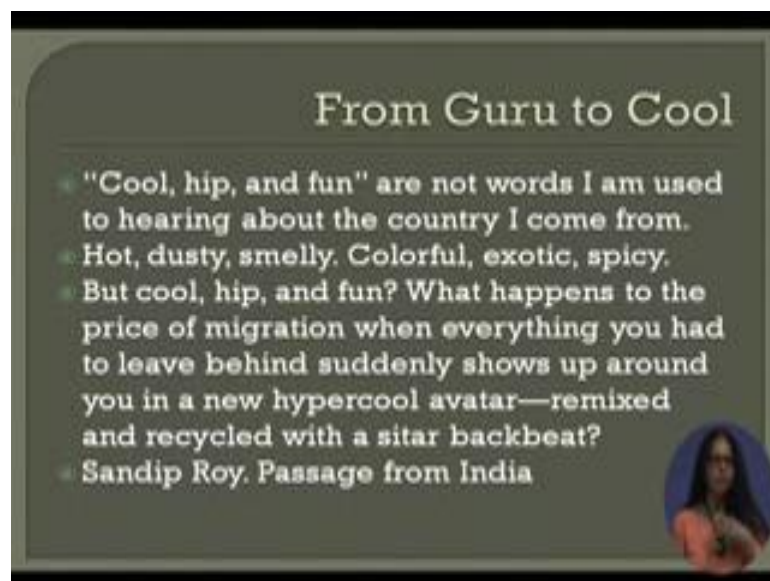
(Refer Slide Time: 25:37)

- By aggressively promoting Indian-English writers like Amit Chaudhuri, Pankaj Mishra and Manil Suri, the conglomerate publishing industry is engaging in the commodification of an exoticised Orientalism. The stereotype of Indians promoted by such works is of paralysed, fatalist characters, at sea in a world of hypermodernity. These novels reinforce westerners' impression of an Indian subcontinent untouched by globalisation, feminism, capitalism and individualism. They serve as armchair tourism, resorting to fetishised symbols of Indian culture that the westerner feels at home in. The antidote to this 'boutique multiculturalism' is awareness of the fabric and texture of Indian life today, a living diversity played out in contesting realms of national and individual identity, often at sharp odds with the comforting notion of an unchanging India palatable to bourgeois western reader.



So, by aggressively promoting Indian English writers, such as Amit Choudhary, Pankaj Mishra, Manil Suri, the publishing industry was engaging in the commodification of a eroticized orientalism. The stereo type of Indians, projected by such works is of paralyzed faithless characters, at sea in the world of hyper modernity. These novels, according to her, reinforce westerners' impression of an Indian subcontinent, untouched by globalization, feminism, capitalism and individualism. They serve as arm chair tourism, resorting to fetishize symbols of Indian culture that the westerner feels at home in. The anti, antidote to this boutique with multiculturalism, is the awareness of the fabric and texture of Indian life today, a living diversity played out in contend contesting realms of national and individual identity, often at sharp odds, with the comforting notion of an unchanging India, palatable to the bourgeois western reader.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:51)



So, we conclude by saying that, the guru turns cool. So, if the 20s and 60s is created cult for the guru, then the new cult in the west, in the 90s was Indo-Chic, the cult of Indian fashion, Indian style, Indian music, Indian food, all things Indian, which turned from mystical spiritual, they turn cool hip and fun. They are not the words I am used to hearing about the country I come from a young woman says, dusty, smelly, colourful exotic, spicy, but cool, hip and fun. What happens to the price of migration? When

everything you had to leave behind, suddenly shows the, shows up around you in a new hyper cool avatar, remixed and recycle with sitar backbeat.

(Refer Slide Time: 27:58)



We leave the final word to Sandip Roy. In his article from Passage to India, to show how the culture of the diasporic people, changes from uncool to cool, from backward in traditional, and primitive, to hip and stylish. And this, the reasons for this, the transformation of India from backward and mystical, spiritual, oriental, tropic, to something as chic, a cool, fashionable, happening, this has, the reasons are not far to find. This really is a reflection of the changing perception of India, and the west imaginary, the transformation of India through its embracing of market capitalism, and it is presenting itself to the world as shining India, in it through its booming economy, avidly promoting tourism, and seeking American foreign investment.

With the end of the cold war, India is aggressively seeking to be part of the global economy. And this rises, this leads to the way Indian culture is being bought and sold in the country, says Arjun Appadurai, who directs the, who directed the globalization project in university of Chicago at that time. So, we close with the words of Arjun Bituroi, one of the leading theorists of globalization, from the global South, who says India is now the new jewel, the jewel in the new US centered crown, who is key

elements are capital, leisure, and high technology. So, this exoticization of India, in the era of orientalism, in the era of neo orientalism, have a lot of things in common, but they also different because the reasons for the emergence of India as cool, or the emergence of Indo-Chic in the new orientalist era is due to the rising power, power of India within the global economy, and its, with a frame within the, hegemony of the sole superpower in the present context of the US, as opposed to the early forms of orientalism, where, during the colonial era or even the 60s, India was are seen as an anti-thesis to, to the material west, and an as an answer to the problems of European modernity.

So, neo orientalism is a trend which, which is seen as producing Europe and America as an alternaty, as anotherness, in opposition to the idea to image of India, but this time India is imagined as cool, India is imagined as chic. We will move on to example, how this altered perception of India, as hip, and cool and chic, translate into a fad for Indian styles, and fashion, Indian food, and several other Indian lifestyle in general.