

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture - 01
Introduction to Course : What is Culture?

So hello and welcome to this first lecture on this NPTEL Course entitled Introduction to Cultural Studies.

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I am a course instructor, Avishek Parui. I teach English at IIT Madras. So in this first lecture today, I will be taking you through the content of the course to a certain extent but also describing or spelling out what the course is about, some of the salient characteristics of this course, some of the key features of this course and more importantly the attitude of the course. It is very important to understand the attitude of the course, what do I expect you to learn from this course and what should you expect from this particular course.

Now, cultural studies as you know is one of the key things in academia today especially humanities. It is you know it is interdisciplinary. It brings in English studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Political Science, Sociology. It can mean a whole host of things. So what I will do in this course in this lecture today is I will talk briefly about the content of what is cultural studies. But before I begin that it is important to understand what is culture.

Now one of the things which you will see in this course that we will use that in terms which we use normally in daily discourses like culture, ideology, religion, philosophy, values etc. Sometimes we use these issues unquestionably. Sometimes we use these issues without really thinking about these things. So one of the things which this course aims to do is to make you conscious of these you know common you know common terms like culture, cultural studies, identity, ideology, etc.

This course is designed in a particular way to attempt to awaken you to a certain extent about understanding the constructed quality of these terms. So you know to what extent is culture constructed. To what extent is identity constructed and once we understand culture or cultural identity as constructs the next logical step would be to question the constructs. To understand how the construction takes place.

So a great deal of this course, a large part of the course will be reliant or will be looking at the politics of production. So by production I mean material production. By production I mean the production of abstract identities, the production of abstract attributes etc. Now before I do anything else I think it is probably most appropriate that I start with the great basic banal definition of culture. Now what is culture?

We need to understand something in order to deconstruct it. In order to understand in its fullest extent we need to know what it is in the first place. So culture I have just got this very common banal definition from the internet.

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It is from oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com where culture is defined as a noun. It is a noun. It is about (()) (02:56) which is the customs and beliefs, art, way of life and social organization of a particular country or group and this is obviously the great working definition of culture. It is a set of beliefs, a set of you know way of life, a social organization etc.

Now, in order to do a serious study of culture, in order to understand culture you know elegantly in a very so intuitive kind of way we have to understand the etymology of the word culture. Where did it come from? It has travelled through different meanings, it has travelled through different discourses and the way we use it today is not really the way it was used at one point of time.

Now a very good starting point for culture is to understand culture in terms of an entanglement. Now, this is one term that is very useful I think in academia and especially in critical theory and humanities.

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Culture as an entanglement of material and abstract attributes

- Language
- Religion
- Art
- Food habits
- Dress codes
- Forms of entertainment

Now entanglement it does not it is a mixture of course where it is a special kind of mixture. It is the mixture where you cannot quantify or we cannot really find out the content in a symmetric kind of a way. So entanglement by very definition is an asymmetric mixture. It is a mixture where different attributes come together, mix together, move out together, move in together and we cannot really quantify, cannot really mark the mixture.

We cannot really mark the extent of which each component is mixed. Now I read culture and I think it is useful for our purpose of this particular course to read culture as an entanglement of material and abstract attributes. Now what do I mean by material and abstract attributes. Now if you look at each of these terms that I have written down and obviously this is by no means an exhaustive list.

We can add on different terms to it but say some written language right and language is something which we use in daily life. We use language to communicate our feelings. We use language to communicate what we want to make ourselves understood, to make ourselves heard, to make ourselves you know obeyed you know in different situations. Now, what is a language? A language as you all agree is a very key component of culture.

It is one of the things which catalyzes a culture you know you can go as far as saying that. Now, language obviously is something of a tool. It can be seen something as an abstract attribute. It is

something which is you know a mark of a particular cultural identity and the same time language is also notoriously material. Now you can have a grammar of a language. You can have a text book of the grammar of language.

You can have a dictionary of the language and I just read out definition of culture from a dictionary just in the previous slide. So language again immediately it tells you it is an asymmetric combination of material and abstract attributes. It is something that you know it is material, it can be it is a palpable tangible presence but at the same time there is a degree of abstraction about language. It is not something that you can hold you know per se.

It is not something that you can you know go and purchase per se although you can purchase a dictionary. So you know it is a very you know curious complex combination of material and abstract attributes and that is something which we will find increasingly. It is true for almost all the cultural components. Now I have just made a list of different terms that I think will be useful. So religion again, faith, art, food habits, dress codes, forms of entertainment and all these things are very common things, very banal things forms of entertainment.

These are very cultural and again as I say culture when I use the word culture I am looking at the word as a mixture of something which is material, something which is economy, something which is political, at the same time something which is you know ideational which inhabits a level of ideas. And I will come to the word ideology in a in a bit. Now before I move on to ideology let us go back and look at these all these terms individually.

Let us pick up art. Now, when we use the word art, obviously, the very lofty the elegant way of looking at art is some kind of an idea, some kind of a creation of human imagination which is obviously true but at the same time art also exists in a very solid material plane of reality. It, all forms of art, almost every production of art and we use the production very consciously you know it is produced out of certain material conditions.

So when you are saying you love the Mona Lisa, the Leonardo da Vinci and obviously it is a great work of art but then we have to realize also that da Vinci was creating or producing these

works of art in a certain historical time, why he was patronized by certain families. He had great patrons and the all the big bourgeois Italian families were you know patronizing him and then of course that the entire economic condition was so determining the kind of art he was producing. The same can be said about Shakespeare.

The same can be said about Picasso, all great artists. So art cannot exist in vacuum. Art is not just some lofty creation out of an imagination of a great human mind. Now, that is obviously true but that great human mind, that imagination also exists in a certain cultural economy, political material plane. So this is again, this brings you back to this old discussion and I keep coming back to this the idea of this combination between materiality and abstraction; where art is material as well as abstraction.

So you watch a great piece of art. You see a great piece of art. You see a great painting. You read a great poem. You watch a great film. Now, all these are great works of art but then of course these are produced out of certain material condition. So that that component of production is a very key component I think and that is something we should not never lose sight of, especially not least when you are doing cultural studies.

Right, so what one of the things which cultural studies should train us to do is to look at the constructed quality of everything right when we talk about faith. To what extent is faith constructed. So what are the political, ideological, economy conditions which inform the construction of faith, the construction of religion. So again religion, faith, art you know customs, values; so these are things which we do not normally associate with material.

So values we think is something which is inherent in us. Something which we so you know is in our head, is inside our brain, is not something out there. But what cultural studies teaches us one of the many things which cultural studies teaches us is very complex relation between inside and outside. Now what is inside a brain and what is outside a brain. What is environment to what extent are we part of the environment. To what extent is environment part of us.

So by environment again, environment is a very loaded term. We can talk about environment as an natural thing, as an organic thing, as an economic thing, as a political thing; all kinds of things constitute an environment. So culture essentially is a way, it is a process really. It is a process through which an individual navigates their way with an environment you know and the way in which an individual establishes a dialogue with an environment right.

And again this dialogue, this navigation, this embodiment so all these are combinations of material and abstract things and that is something I will keep coming back to. Likewise food habits right. Now food habits obviously is a very complex thing. A food obviously is a marker of culture. You look at any culture, you find that there are different kinds of food you know pertaining or corresponding different kinds of cultural customs or cultural situation.

So there is a festive food for every culture. There is a food of mourning for certain cultures. There is a food of you know celebration for some cultures. A food of you know something which is banal, something which is celebratory, something which is festive. So you know different social moods and different cultural moods have different kinds of food. So how does this correspondence come into being right.

These correspondences come into being through material processes right. So it is not an abstract thing entirely. So food, forms of entertainment, and again forms of entertainment are very complex things because you know we can have what we can call high culture entertainment or we can have low culture entertainment. Now mind you, these divisions are very artificial. High culture, low culture, so these things blend with each other all the time.

So what is high culture entertainment today might become low culture tomorrow and vice versa right so I mean to just give you an example we read Shakespeare today as example of high culture. When we read Macbeth, when we read Julius Caesar or you know Hamlet, we think of these things as epitomes, a great works of art and if you are watching a production of Hamlet, if you are reading Macbeth we so can graduate ourselves as consuming something which is high art.

But mind you when Shakespeare was actually writing the plays when Shakespeare was actually producing these plays those were not meant for high culture production or high culture consumption at all. So those were meant as mass entertainments; something very akin to mainstream film industries today; whether it is Indian film industry or Hollywood or whatever. So Shakespeare essentially wanted to be a seller of theater.

He wanted to be a producer of theater which will sell well, which would be consumed by the mass, which will be consumed by the public etc. So but that kind of theater later on became something of a high art theater and now when you watch Shakespeare or read Shakespeare like I said we shall congratulate ourselves for consuming high culture or high art. So again what I would want you to be aware of is the constructed mutable quality of culture and again the word mutable is very useful, is changeable.

So culture changes all the time it is changing even as I am talking to you, even as I listen to this video like language. Language changes all the time. So what is sophisticated language, what is non-sophisticated. Again these are very mutable categories right. So it is very useful for the purpose of this course, for the purpose of cultural studies to look at culture not as a static you know dead entity but as an organic life mutable process.

It is a very organic process and the organicity, the mutability of the process is something which we should be aware of you know as we study cultural studies and especially in its you know as a complex phenomenon right.

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In 1945, after the ending of the wars with Germany and Japan, I was released from the Army to return to Cambridge. University term had already begun, and many relationships and groups had been formed. It was in any case strange to travel from an artillery regiment on the Kiel Canal to a Cambridge college. I had been away only four and a half years, but in the movements of war had lost touch with all my university friends. Then, after many strange days, I met a man I had worked with in the first year of the war, when the formations of the 1930s, though under pressure, were still active. He too had just come out of the Army. We talked eagerly, but not about the past. We were too much preoccupied with this new and strange world around us. Then we both said, in effect simultaneously: 'the fact is, they just don't speak the same language'.

Raymond Williams, 'Introduction', *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. 11.

Now, what I will do right now is this is a quotation from a book that I find it very useful and I have been drawing on this quite a lot while we are dealing with this particular course. So this is a book called *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* by a very famous Marxist critic called Raymond Williams. Now the reason why I have chosen this particular quotation is because it illustrates in a very graphic way, in a very disturbing uncertain way to a certain extent the mutability of culture right, how culture changes.

Now, when I say culture changes, it is a very slow process sometimes invisible but of course where certain events where certain occurrences of human history which exhilarates these changes like for instance when you have a war, when you have a war of massive scale and human destruction happens you know human catastrophe happens, people die; there is a great massive loss of you know property, human resources etc.

Now, when something like that happens that can be considered to be a paradigm shift something which generally shifts the idea of culture and you know if you compare pre-war societies with post-war societies you find often times we find you know vivid examples of change of culture and this is Raymond Williams who actually fought in the Second World War. I mean he did not fight but he was used as some kind of a you know an officer in the Second World War.

He was basically a radio officer in the Second World War. He was used for decoding signals etc. Now, he went to the war and in post-war he came back and joined the Cambridge University. Now what he is describing in this particular passage which I will read out to you is and when he comes back after the war he finds everything has changed. The way people talk has changed. The way people dress have changed you know the way people behave has changed.

So in other words there has been a cultural shift, a cultural paradigm shift you know which has happened post war. So this is what he says. In 1945, after the ending of the wars with Germany and Japan, I was released from the Army to return to Cambridge. University term had already begun and many relationships and groups had been formed. It was in any case strange to travel from an artillery regiment on the Kiel Canal to a Cambridge college.

I had been away for only four and a half years, but in the movements of war had lost touch with all my university friends. Then, after many strange days, I met a man I had worked with in the first year of the war, when the formation of the 1930s, though under pressure, were still active. He too had just come out of the Army. We talked eagerly, but not about the past. We were too much preoccupied with this new and strange world around us.

Then we both said, in effect simultaneously: 'the fact is, they just do not speak the same language'. So what we see over here is a very interesting phenomenon and that something which happens a lot to returning soldiers and you know returning soldiers are very useful marker for change of culture because they go to the war in a certain culture. They suffer the war. They suffer atrocities in a war.

They suffer trauma in the war and they come back to a post-war culture and they find themselves completely out of place. They find themselves as misfits of a particular culture and its entire idea of moving out or becoming alienated from a certain culture is a very good example of how culture moves.

So when I say I do not find myself connected to a culture anymore I do not find myself familiarized with a culture anymore; what I am essentially saying is that is after defamiliarization

has happened because culture has moved on and I have not moved on in sync with a particular culture right. So the idea of moving, the idea of you know mutability, the idea of movement is something which is inherent in every culture.

And for any culture to be organic and alive and flourishing and thriving movement is a precondition. Movement, mutability, mobility these are the preconditions. These are the fundamental conditions of any culture. If the culture does not move it dies a natural death right. So you know I am requesting you I am advising you to look at culture as an organic, mutable phenomenon.

As a complex process of becoming, being and becoming, display between being and becoming is something which categorizes almost every culture right. So what Raymond Williams sayings over here is when he went to the war he was located in a particular culture. Now when he came back after the war he found himself completely dislocated. Now how does this dislocation happen? This dislocation happens because of a movement in culture.

The culture has moved on when he was in the war and he came back and he found himself completely alienated from this this particular culture and he finds a comrade he talks to and both of them agree and it is a very dramatic agreement. They almost say simultaneously as is written in the passage, 'the fact is they just do not speak the same language'. So language is strange.

Now by language of course Williams means discourse, vocabulary I mean language can be used as a metaphor sometimes right. I mean it is not just a language in which I am talking to you and the language which I use to speak to other people. Language can be body language. Language can be sartorial language, how you dress can also become a language, can also become a statement. How you eat can also become a statement etc.

So when he says they do not speak the same language, the language becomes a metaphor of a cultural change, a profound cultural change which has essentially alienated this individual who went to the war okay.

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Raymond William's definition of culture

The complexity of the modern development of the word, and of its modern usage, can then be appreciated. We can easily distinguish the sense which depends on a literal continuity of physical process as now in 'sugar-beet culture' or, in the specialized physical application in bacteriology since the 1880s, 'germ culture'. But once we go beyond the physical reference, we have to recognize three broad active categories of usage [. . .]

- (i) the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development, from C18
- (ii) the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general
[. . .]
- (iii) the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity. This seems often now the most widespread use: **culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theatre and film. A Ministry of Culture refers to these specific activities, sometimes with** the addition of philosophy, scholarship, history.

Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, 90.

So now drawing on that moving on we come to Williams' definition of culture. Now, how does he define culture. It is a very interesting definition and I advise you to read the entire passage from this particular book called *Keywords of Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. It was published you know many years ago but it is still very relevant today because it is more like a dictionary of culture right.

It is something which you can use, something which you can draw on and what it teaches you essentially is how certain cultural words travel through time. They start with a meaning and they end with a complete different meaning. So the same happens with the word culture ironically. So he says and I am quoting him over here. The complexity of the modern development of the word culture, he talks about culture. This is the entry on culture on the dictionary and of its modern usage can then be appreciated.

We can easily distinguish the sense which depends on a literal continuity of physical process as now in sugar-beet culture or in the specialized physical application in bacteriology since the 1880s germ culture. But once we go beyond the physical reference we have to recognize three broad active categories of usage. So culture essentially it comes from you know the same root as cultivation. So culture means cultivation.

Culture means growing something originally it came from that kind of a you know root. So we still use, we still retain that meaning when we use the culture of bacteria, the culture of sugar beet etc. So that was the original root of meaning of the word but obviously it has travelled and now it has come to three broad kinds of usage, categories of usage. As William says the first one is the independent and abstract noun which describes a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development from 18th century.

So you know again look at the combination, intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic. Now, all these are very abstract definitions, very abstract categories but none of these are completely or absolutely abstract and this is something I would keep saying and it is nothing called absolute abstraction that every form of abstraction is a production from a certain material process okay. Is never divorced absolutely from the material process.

Second, the independent noun, whether used generally or specifically, which indicates a particular way of life, whether of a people, a period, a group, or humanity in general. So a way of life, a lifestyle in other words, a narrative of life. How you use the life, how you live a life. So again we find the very second definition tells you there is a certain degree of coded quality in culture. It is a set of codes so which you have to abide by, have to confirm.

Now, we see that codes keep changing. Now, when we do cultural studies what we essentially try to do is to decode culture look at the codes how the codes are configured in the first place. How they are tuned in, in the first place and once we figure that out once we figure how they are tuned in then our job would be to detune it to find out how to deconstruct it, to deconstruct the code of quality of culture. So how does or how do people, how does the community live a life.

Right and obviously it is a very loaded question, how a community lives a life depends on the geography of the place, depends on the history of the place, depends on the economic condition of the community etc. which can never be taken away from the coded quality which we call culture. Thirdly, the independent and abstract noun which describes the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity.

This seems most, this seems often now the most widespread use. Culture is music, literature, painting and sculpture, theater and film. A Ministry of Culture refers to these specific activities sometimes with the addition of philosophy, scholarship, history. Now we have a Ministry of Culture. Now, the culture over here means it is very lofty, a human pursuit like literature, art, philosophy, films etc. It is all brought together under the umbrella term of culture.

Now, what it means is culture becomes a symbol of a particular community. How does it become a marker, a reservoir for the achievements of a community; achievements of art, achievements of language, achievements in you know cinema, achievements in painting, achievements in literature, etc. So culture becomes a bit of a you know a kind of a configuration, a kind of coded configuration which is achieved by a certain human population in a given particular point in history okay and that is very important to know.

Now when we do cultural studies what we are aware of, what we are interested in essentially is how these configurations happen and how this literary productions take place. How do this you know lofty lyrics written. What are the conditions which inform the production of this lyrics, production of this films, production of painting, etc. right.

So because you know even if you look at one culture, even if you say “we are interested in German culture or British culture or Indian culture or French culture” we find and even within that one kind of on demography of culture there are different historical shifts right. So the shift from history point A to point B is accompanied by a shift in culture. It could be a cultural decline, it could be a cultural upliftment, it could be a cultural progress etc. But the shift is a condition, the mutability is a condition in culture right.

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Culture and cultural identities

- Identities play a key role in culture and cultural formations, inasmuch as they become vehicles for articulations, consolidation as well as subversions of cultural categories.
- Identities can be hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and subversive in relation to culture and cultural locations. Thus any serious study of culture must take into account the politics of producing, preserving and propagating identities.

Now, next we come to a very key term and this is a term which is almost synonymous with culture you know it is almost inseparable from culture to a certain extent, the question of identity right. So how does identity, how do identities operate in culture. How identities is formed in culture. So identities play a key role in culture and cultural formations inasmuch as they become vehicles for articulations, consolidation as well as subversions of cultural categories.

And these few words, I have carefully chosen these words because I think we need to spend some time in looking at these words, articulation, consolidation, and subversion. Now, articulation of course is iteration of culture. They are iterative quality of culture. You are saying something. You know you are making a statement about a particular culture it becomes a cultural statement; you are pronouncing a culture, you are announcing a culture right.

Consolidation is a strengthening of that culture right. So by repeated articulation and by articulation I am not just meaning saying it, you are making a statement. It could be the way you are wearing a dress. It could be the way you are worshipping a particular religion. It could be the way you are eating a certain kind of food. It could be the way you are spending your money in a certain way. It could be the way you are driving a certain car.

So all these become articulations. Now consolidation is a way in which a particular identity is strengthened right. So consolidation depends on articulation to a certain extent. I mean it is a

repeated articulation. So you keep articulating something and in the process you consolidate it. You become you transform something into hegemonic identity, a dominant identity right. Now subversion is an interesting thing. Subversion is a resistance towards hegemony.

You submerge something means you deconstruct something, you question something right. Now oftentimes you find that subversions or subversive styles they become hegemonic after a certain point. So what is subversive today, what is rebellious today might become fashionable tomorrow right. What is fashionable today might become rebellious tomorrow. So again it brings about its old question of mutability right; the mutability, the mobility, the plasticity of culture, the elasticity of culture.

So every like I said all cultures will die natural death if they were not elastic. So elasticity is something of a condition in culture and so subversion, consolidation, articulation so it appears over here that these are different ontological categories where actually they are quite it is perfectly possible for them to merge into each other right. Like I said what is subversive today might become hegemonic tomorrow and vice versa.

So identities can be hegemonic, subordinate, complicit, and subversive in relation to culture and cultural locations. Thus any serious study of culture must take into account the politics of producing, preserving and propagating identities. So you know if you look at these adjective, hegemonic, subordinate, complicit and subversive. So hegemonic of course is dominant. When I say this is a hegemonic identity what I am saying essentially this is a dominant identity right.

This is the top identity. Subordinate is something which is you know after hegemonic. Something which obeys a hegemonic identity something that is inferior to hegemonic identity. Complicit is interesting. Complicit means something which is not in itself hegemonic but something which supports the hegemonic identity right. So when I am saying you know he is complicit to the crime what I am essentially saying is he is not maybe part of the crime.

He is not playing the lead role in the crime but he is supporting the crime. He is supporting the process of the crime. So when I am saying complicit category of culture what I am essentially

saying is that section of culture who are not hegemonic but they support in hegemony, support in a status quo to a certain extent. Subversive as it is explained to you is the rebellious bitten culture.

Something which rebels against hegemony, something which tries to bring down hegemony. Something which moves against any kind of dominance. Now, what I am saying over here essentially is any serious study of culture when I am looking at culture as a process as a mutable, complex process or phenomenon which combines economic and material attributes when I am using that definition of culture which we will for the purpose of discourse we must take into account the politics of producing, preserving and propagating identities.

Now, you may have noticed already that I am not using the word creating. I am using the word producing because I am trying to underline the constructive quality of culture. When I am saying producing something there is a degree of materiality to it. Whereas if we use the word creating something it seems it is active abstractionism. That is something which we are using we are doing with the brain, something which we are using with your intellect, with your imagination alone and of course that is how imagination operates.

It is how creation happens but then of course the point is no art of creation exists on a vacuum. No act of you know producing something exists in a vacuum. It must be used. It must be brought out to a certain material condition. So hence the word producing because the word producing is more banal than creating and I am deliberately being banal over here for the purpose of discourse. So it is the way you are producing identities, the politics of production.

It is not just production because production is a very loaded term. When I am using the word producing or production it has to be you know used alongside the conditions of production, what are the economic, etiological, social conditions of production which govern the act of production and preserving and propagating identity. So the 3 Ps essentially; producing, preserving, and propagating.

When you produce an identity when you produce a certain cultural icon, a cultural marker how do you preserve it and how do you propagate it. Now, it does not take a rocket scientist to know that you know if you want to make something hegemonic you must push it right and the push for hegemonic identity must happen to an economy process. So when you want a certain kind of style to become hegemonic style you must advertise it, you must make it visible.

You must circulate it. You must disseminate it. You must see to it that as (()) (29:47) gets consumed endlessly add infinitum right. So only then it becomes a hegemonic style. Only then it becomes a hegemonic marker. Of course I am using metaphors over here that can be anything. That can be language or certain way of speaking. It can be accent or certain manner of speaking. That can be dress or certain way of dressing.

Sartorial culture is a very important thing that can be food. So how do certain food items become fashionable and you can only become fashionable or hegemonic if you circulate it. If it is consumed on mass. If it is consumed you know across society, you know you find it in shops everywhere. You find it in big restaurants, very posh cafes etc. So you know it becomes an economic activity to a certain extent.

So again this brings us back to the idea of culture as an activity right not as something which is static or you know a dormant thing which we can analyze but it is an activity. It is a very organic activity which you know brings into account, which brings into play economy, politics, language and all kinds of things together right okay.

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- One of the key characteristics of culture, and one that must be taken into account in any serious cultural studies course, is the innate and almost organic mutability that informs the material as well as the abstract attributes of culture. So let's talk about something like **VALUES**, which are a part of almost all cultures like identities.
- Values may be considered as a quotient for cultural consolidation in terms of mapping out acceptable and unacceptable codes of conduct. Yet values can be notoriously mutable and determined by economic, political and ideological conditions.

So and then which brings us to the you know much extension of this is the characteristics of culture. So one of the key characteristics of culture and one that must be taken into account in any serious cultural studies course is the innate and almost organic mutability. We have spoken about it but I have highlighted again over here is innate. This organic mutability is something which is innate in culture. Something which is there in culture all the time.

It is a condition in every culture. Now, this organicity or this organic mutability it informs the material as well as the abstract attributes of culture. So let us talk also like values right so you know which are part of almost all cultures like identities. So you know we use our own values. So when I say you know this culture has very great values or there are certain values which should be followed, which should be respected etc.

We do not use the word value normally as a material thing. We use the word value as an abstract thing. The value is just kindness, compassion, mercy. It is a very abstract thing. It is a you know attributes, abstract attributes not so much material things. However, values can be considered or it should be considered I think in my mind as a quotient for cultural consolidation in terms of mapping out acceptable and unacceptable codes of conduct.

Now, I am using the word mapping out quite deliberately over here. When I am mapping out something, it is a material process right. So when I am saying these things are mapped in and

these things are mapped out what I am saying essentially is certain things are included and certain things are excluded which brings me which brings us rather to the idea of representation. Now representation is a very innate quality of every culture.

So every culture is represented, a culture has to be represented. You can represent it to dress. It can be represented to your dietary customs. It can be represented by your linguistic activities. It can be represented by the manner of speaking, the manner of walking, your politics, language, religion everything. So all forms, all vehicles, all markers of culture become acts of representation.

Now, every act of representation as you know this bit of a theoretical thing, a theoretical study of representation, every act of representation includes or rather combines inclusion and exclusion. So when you are representing something you are including certain attributes and equally you are excluding certain attributes and this act of inclusion and exclusion happen almost simultaneously.

And again the word entanglement is useful over here because you know if we use the word entanglement that seems to be of time because the word describes, underlines, or highlights as the unmappable quality of representation. I mean you cannot quantify to what extent it is including certain things to what extent it is excluding certain things. It is a very unquantifiable process. That is exactly how representation works.

Now, values I am looking at values as quotient for cultural consolidation in terms of mapping out acceptable and unacceptable codes of conduct and again these are very stoically sensitive things; a very context sensitive things. So what is unacceptable in 18th century, 18th century Germany might be perfectly acceptable in 21st century Delhi or you know 21st century Chennai.

So again the location or the place is important. The geography of the place is important. The history of the place is important. You cannot possibly look at culture by divorcing culture from these attributes right. So acceptable, nonacceptable these codes change all the time mapping in

mapping out these change all the time as well. So values are not something which are absolute. Values of course are mutable. Values of course are constructed.

Values of course can be you know deconstructed and reconstructed. So in other words values too have a textural quality like culture right. So the textuality of culture, the textuality of value is something which we should be aware of especially in cultural studies. So values can be notoriously mutable and determined by economic, political, and etiological condition. Again values like art, like religion, like dress, like food they cannot be separated possibly from economy, etiological, material conditions.

So values too are productions right. So and the word production is something which we use endlessly, something which we will hear endlessly. It will probably bore you but it is a useful word in cultural studies right. So when you use in cultural studies production is something which you use all the time because that is what happens in culture. Culture is produced from material conditions.

Language is produced, art is produced, literature is produced, cinema is produced and that becomes a part of and of the activity of culture right.

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"Times change, values don't," announces an advertisement for a daily newspaper, as though we still believed in killing off infirm infants or putting the mentally ill on public show. Just as people may treat a work as philosophy in one century and as literature in the next, or vice versa, so they may change their minds about what writing they consider valuable. They may even change their minds about the grounds they use for judging what is valuable and what is not."

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1983.
10-11

Now, this is just a reiteration and a consolidation of what I just said. This is Terry Eagleton, the very famous Marxist critic quoting from a very interesting book called *Literary Theory an Introduction*, a book I suggest you should read especially those of you who come from literature background and you are looking at the interface of literature and cultural studies this is one of the basic beginners book that you should be reading you know very illustrative, very useful and very elegantly written.

Now, Eagleton over here is basically dramatizing the mutability of values. He is saying values change all the time and it is being unwise if you are saying that values are you know universal, values do not change. So times change, values do not announces an advertisement for a daily newspaper as though we still believed in killing of infirm infants or putting the mentally ill on public show.

Just as people may treat a work as philosophy in one century and as literature in the next or vice versa so they may change their minds about what writing they consider valuable. They may even change their minds about the grounds they use for judging what is valuable and what is not. So you know the references, there are 2 very **rendicive** (()) (36:37) references over here. One is the killing of infirm infant.

Now, some of you might be aware this was a very common practice especially in ancient Greece where you know in Sparta which was a military capital of Greece, every male child who was born would be sort of taken to a particular hill, kept in a stone and you know cover with a leaf for the whole night and then the next morning the people would go up to the hill and see if the child had survived the cold. If the child had survived the cold, he would be raised as a soldier.

If the child died in the cold which was perfectly possible then the assumption was it was not strong enough to be a Spartan soldier. This custom of taking a baby, an infant taking it to a stone you know putting in the stone and then covering with a leaf just to test its strength, its durability, its longevity against natural conditions would sound barbaric to us today. It will sound barbaric to everyone, every rational person today would be shocked on listening on hearing this.

But mind you this was a perfectly acceptable practice. This was part of the value system, a very sophisticated culture at one point of time, this Spartan culture, the Greek culture which we use sometimes as we hail sometimes as an epitome of human civilization, as an epitome of human cultural achievement. But even in that kind of cultural achievement we find this barbaric customs.

The second reference that Eagleton mentions is putting the mentally ill on public show. This is more recent as late as 18th century examples of people, you know mad people taken out of asylums and made to walk in the streets you know for entertainment of the rational people on the streets and this is again a barbaric custom according to us today.

But this was perfectly practiced in France, in England and different parts of Europe, Western Europe, countries which were not considered to be very cultural countries, very sophisticated countries, countries which were progressive in terms of how they look at you know medically ill people or mad people but then at one point of time, not very distant past the very common practice was to put mad people on public show to be consumed as spectacular entertainments right.

So what Eagleton is saying here is you know these cultural customs, these cultural activities which are barbaric to us today was perfectly acceptable and also sophisticated to a certain extent in not too distant past. So the next bit is more interesting. So he is saying just as people may treat a work as philosophy in one century and as literature in the next. So what is being said over here is a parameter string. So what is philosophy today might become fiction tomorrow right.

What is religion today might become fiction tomorrow, might become fantasy tomorrow. The very it is a very generic kind of a change ontological generic change. So what happens is how the interesting question is how does this change happen? So what are the conditions which create this change, which produce this change right. So you know a work of religion today which people have faith in which people believe to be true how does it become a work of fiction tomorrow, a work of fantasy tomorrow.

A work of philosophy which you know philosophy obviously comes you know it, the assumption is it is true, it is the truth about life etc. how does it become literature tomorrow right and you can think of examples of how works of philosophy are now read as works of literature etc. right. There are still examples in our country as well where we have this change. Now, the key question is they may change their minds about why they consider valuable and this is a very important thing.

So this brings us to the idea of valuable writing and non-valuable writing right. So when I am saying valuable writing, I am talking about high literature high art etc. and non-valuable writing could be pulp fiction, could be bestsellers etc. Now again these categories are very contingent categories, a very complex categories and they are changing all the time. So what is valuable writing today might be trashed tomorrow and vice versa.

I am just mentioning Shakespeare to you and when I said the Shakespeare today is obviously high art, high literature but at one point of time when he was actually writing these plays, when he was producing these plays he was just looked at as an entertainer. Someone who is a you know a showman really. Someone who wanted his theaters, his dramas to be commercial successes. That was all that he was interested in right.

So and the other question, the related question is they may even change their minds about the grounds they use for judging what is valuable and what is not. So the parameters, the measuring instruments that are used to give value to certain works of art. Those instruments may change. Those parameters might change and again this change is a material change. This change happens to economic conditions, to material conditions, to etiological conditions right.

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“Value’ is a transitive term: it means whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations, according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes. It is thus quite possible that, given a deep enough transformation of our history, we may in the future produce a society which is unable to get anything at all out of Shakespeare. His works might simply seem desperately alien, full of styles of thought and feeling which such a society found limited or irrelevant. In such a situation, Shakespeare would be no more valuable than much present-day graffiti. And though many people would consider such a social condition tragically impoverished, it seems to me dogmatic not to entertain the possibility that it might arise rather from a general human enrichment.”

And so he moves on he goes on with his definition and he says this is Eagleton again, value is a transitive term, is a moving process. It means that whatever is valued by certain people in specific situations according to particular criteria and in the light of given purposes. It is thus quite possible that given a deep enough transformation of our history we may in the future produce a society which is unable to get anything at all out of Shakespeare.

This might sound shocking to us today. We will think Shakespeare is universal. Shakespeare is timeless. We can always draw from Shakespeare lessons of life acceptable. Eagleton is saying it is perfectly possible that we arrive at a certain human condition at a human society where Shakespeare becomes completely useless, completely valueless. People do not get anything out of Shakespeare at all. It is possible that we arrive at such a condition.

His works might simply seem desperately alien, full of styles of thought and feeling which such a society found limited or irrelevant, again irrelevant I mean it is valueless essentially. In such a situation Shakespeare would be no more valuable than much present day graffiti and though many people would consider such a social condition tragically impoverish it seems to be dogmatic not to entertain the possibility that it might arise rather from a general human enrichment.

Now what he is saying is he is sort of pitching a conventional take on Shakespeare with a unconventional take on Shakespeare. Now if I say if I if 2 people are in conversation and one of them says you know there might be a time when Shakespeare would just become pulp fiction. Shakespeare might just become wild art and nothing else. The common response the conventional response would be oh that would be such a shame.

That would be such a tragic impoverishment of culture. You know when he cannot take Shakespeare critically when he cannot look at Shakespeare as a lofty, literary activity then obviously that means a cultural decline has happened. Now, what Eagleton is saying is interesting. He is saying it is dogmatic. It is irrational.

It is dogmatic to understand to assume that you know when Shakespeare is you know is irrelevant that necessarily means some cultural impoverishment has happened. It is perfectly possible that Eagleton argues that such a condition may arise out of human enrichment. That people move on from Shakespeare. People find something better. Maybe they found something you know a better way of looking at life, a better way of looking at literature.

They moved on from Shakespeare and hence Shakespeare is relegated to something of a wall art or graffiti etc. So it is perfectly possible Eagleton argues that you know Shakespeare becomes wall art and a condition which is superior to the condition that we inhabit today. In other words nothing is sacred enough not to change right. No work of literature, no work of politics, no work of painting, no work of anything really is safely enough not to change.

So sacrality of something should be questioned because everything is a construct. Everything has been produced and certain historical material conditions. And because it is produced in certain conditions it can be reproduced it can also be deproduced right. It can be sort of irrelevant at some point of time because it came out of some historical conditions and when those conditions change it might be perfectly possible for that work to become irrelevant completely right.

So just to conclude actually, I mean the first lecture essentially what we have just said and I am just sort of summarizing what we just said culture should be looked at as a complex activity, a

complex phenomenon. It is organic, it is mutable, it is plastic, it is elastic, it is changing all the time. It constitutes things which are abstract as well as material and the interesting thing about culture is a very asymmetric combination of abstraction and materiality right.

And the things associated with culture like values customs, codes etc. these too change all the time. So what we will look at in the next lectures and the course of this particular you know lesson is that you know how the constructive quality of culture should be studied, should be examined as a material condition and how does material conditions produce things which appear nonmaterial like art, lofty attributes you know etc.

This concludes the first lecture. I hope you got something out of it and please go the references that we have used and I will see you in the next lecture. Thank you for your attention.