

Introduction to Cultural Studies
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Lecture – 46
Introduction to Cultural Studies - Summary

So hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Introduction to Cultural Studies. We have covered quite a few text till now. So what we will do in this particular lecture which will be a longish lecture. We will have a quick summary of all the text that we have covered so far and we will just go through all the text we have done so far and have a general discussion on the text before we move on to the next text which will be the final text for this particular course which is Slavoj Zizek's Welcome to the Dessert of the Real.

We will also look at Dick Hebdige's culture studies book; culture studies work among the pioneers of cultural studies in the lectures to come. But before we do that, before move to Hebdige's or Zizek, we will spend this particular lecture, a longish lecture, having a quick summary, having a quick, so look back to whatever you have done so far in this particular course.

So just go back in the very beginning when we set up to define cultural studies, when we set up to define a culture, we looked at culture as a very interesting mixture, a very mutable mixture of some material things, some abstract things, things which are material as well as abstract such as religion, language, race, etc., fruit. And we also looked at how culture is one of the conditions of culture is, it keeps changing all the time.

So the coordinates of culture changes what we call high culture, what we call low culture. I mean these coordinates changes as well as the what is low cultured, they might become high culture tomorrow, etc. A classic case and point would be William Shakespeare, for instance when Shakespeare's plays were originally produced way back in Elizabeth in England. No one part of those plays is a high culture event, is a high culture phenomenon.

They cater to a different kinds of audiences, they cater to the royalty, they cater to the very

working class people. So there is a lot of body humour in Shakespeare as you all know. Those of you read Shakespeare would know there were sections in Shakespeare, especially the comedy sections where things can be quite gross and body and non-substicated but that is actually part of the package because that caters to a certain kind of audience who come to consume that kind of spectacle.

But yet we look at Shakespeare today as high culture. I mean like he is just walks a talk in universities across the globe. Actually we have way many seminars on Shakespeare. He keeps getting commemorated, the different kinds of papers may have written, different kinds of research been done and so Shakespeare's high cultured paper and originally he was not so when his plays were produced and you can think of many more examples such as this.

So we talked about that, we talked about how culture is a very mutable mixture. It keeps changing. It is an entanglement. It has material coordinates. It has abstract coordinates. Culture can become hegemonic culture. It can take up hegemonic dominant proportions. Culture can also become subversive at certain points. Even within one particular culture, we can have subversive and dominant coordinates, discourses exist in some times simultaneously parallel to each other, etc.

So we looked at how culture what we call culture is a very complex thing, is a very complex phenomenon and I used the word phenomenon quite literally. So it is something which is obviously constructed, something which is textualized something which works the text, something which works as a discourse. But also there is an experiential quality about culture which we must never lose sight off.

And if you remember the text that we had which kept reminding us of this was Ian Hacking's, the Social Construction of What which is a critique of the construction series of culture which itself looks at culture just from a narrow prism of construction and Hacking critiques that of course in that particular book which is very useful reminder, a very timely reminder because it is very easy to get seduced by this constructioners discourse where we look at everything is a text, etc.

And that is fine, that is true. There is a textual quality but culture as well. But it is also an experiential qualities or phenomenon quality about culture which we must never lose sight of and that particular component, that phenomenal experiential component, that forms a lived reality of culture, I mean what we call culture, the way we live culture, the way we embody culture, enact culture.

That is very experiential. And you know, most of the texts that we studied in this particular course, especially texts which are essays, first-hand essays, autobiographical essays, they keep reminding us of the experientiality of culture, the phenomenal quality of culture which can become profound in psychological existential in its scope. So if you think of an essay such as George Orwell's Shooting an Elephant, it is extremely discursive.

It is something which, you know, it dramatizes discursivity with some kind of discursivity, the discursivity they have been, you know the white man's superiority, the colonial mission, the colonial control mechanism, etc. But also there is an experientiality about the whole essay, about the whole experience, about the whole event. So it is a discursive as well as an experiential event.

And this constant mingling of discursivity and experientiality is what makes the essay really interesting for us today, shooting an Elephant because, you know, and then there are questions of agency, identity, masculinity, performativity, always keep coming up in that particular essay. So in that essay along with Frantz Fanon's essays on Black Skin White Masks and we just completed Bell Hooks Essay Understanding Patriarchy.

So we see how these cultural documents, I mean, one could consider these as profound cultural documents. How these cultural documents combine this element of discursivity and experientiality and we need to look at these 2 categories, experientiality and discursivity as complimenting each other, as sort of being dialoguing with each other.

So it is not necessary ideological opposites, they are not necessarily, you know, on the cutting edge all the time which is a very binaristic way of looking at cultural mechanisms when we say

so this is a discursive bed and this is a experiential bed. We cannot really map all these things quite as clearly.

They are constantly mixing with each other and we never quite know if it is an asymmetric mixture, we never quite know to what extent something is discursive and just what extent something is experiential in quality. This is a constant mixture. It is very mutable. It is very mutable mixture and that is what one of the key conditions of culture, any culture for that matter and that is something that we in culture studies must be extremely aware of when we are looking at these kinds of cultural text.

So again this is something we have talked about already but one of the things about culture when we need to know is the different kinds, the ways we are looking at culture and culture studies work for instance. The prism, the perspective of Marxism which is a very interesting way in terms of looking at the economic entanglement of culture and how every culture is economically determined.

There is an economic base which informs every culture and out of that base, we have different kinds of superstructural coordinates such as language, religion, fashion, feud, etc. As that kind of a superstructural frame emerges out of that economic base in a very interesting way. So Marxism is a very useful way of looking at culture, especially if you are looking at it from base superstructure perspective.

But then again as Homi Bhaba reminded us in the other question this base superstructure perspective should not become a binary, should not become a dualistic thing where base and superstructure are ideologically different. So you have many instances where base and superstructure are keep reversing and they keep mingling with each other and they are no quite know what is base and what is superstructure and one particular phenomenon can inhabit both of these categories quite easily and quite comprehensively.

So Marxism is a very useful way of looking at culture. Psychology is a very useful way of looking at culture because one of the key conditions of culture is appropriation. So usually what

appropriation and different kinds and ways appropriation is discursive, so you discursively appropriate something. You appropriate some chords or behaviour, chords of contact, sartorial chords, gastronomic chords, etc., linguistic chords but also appropriation can be as profound as a psychological phenomenon because it is also part of internalization.

You are internalizing certain coordinates, internalizing certain isms, certain ideology and that process is quite psychological. So again is quite experiential in quality. So discursivity, experientiality go hand in hand when you talk about something that is appropriation which is perhaps the most important verb when you look at culture and culture studies appropriation. We are constantly appropriating things.

We are appropriating language. We are appropriating idioms. We are appropriating certain cultural coordinates. We are appropriating certain kinds genetic coordinates, etc. So appropriation is a very useful, a very important term in cultural studies and connected to appropriation is a question of agency. Again this question keeps coming after all this particular course as I am sure all of you are aware of.

All the text you have studied, that more or less talk about agency in some form or the other. So when you talk about something like Orwell's essay, Shooting an Elephant, that essay becomes a very interesting description, a very paradoxical drama of agency in the sense that the person with notionally a genetic cell. The person who is notionally a genetic, most genetic, most privileged and a genetic, turns out to be the most agencyless in the end.

So agency again like culture is a very mutable category. So it can appear full as well as empty at the same time. So, I mean, in the case of that particular essay, Orwell's, Shooting an Elephant, what we see in the end of the essay is a liquidation of agency. So as an exhaustion of agency, the person loses agency and just has to enact the particular duty expected of him, the particular cultural appropriation expected of him as a white man in the colonial setting.

Although notionally he is a most genetic person in the entire drama. So he has notionally, theoretically the most agency in that particular setting but at the same time, he loses agency

because he has agency. So the question of power also comes in to being quite clearly and we have read Foucault, what is an Author where he talks about this very interesting, he offers a very discursive analysis of the questionable authority, power, authorship, etc. which becomes very important points in the cultural studies.

But then again each of these categories, power, authority, authorship, agency, these are very mutabilities. So mutability is one of the constants of culture you might say. Every culture is mutable; every cultural coordinate is mutable. So agency, power, authority, these are cultural coordinates and these are mutable, mutability becomes the key condition for each of these coordinates at any given point in time.

So one of the things which we also were mindful of in this course was the historical frame of any culture. So we cannot study any particular cultural phenomenon by divorcing it from historical frame. So historicity is a very important condition for cultural studies. We must locate by even within the particular historical frame. So you are looking at Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, we are looking in historical frame of French Algeria in colonial conditions.

And if you take it out of the frame and look at it from a macro perspective, a neutral perspective, you will lose out in the integrity of what has been said by Fanon. We lose out in the cultural specificity where that particular essay demands as a text. So we look at Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*, we see how the body becomes very important. The black body becomes a very discursive design in a certain condition.

It is racialized, epidermalized as Fanon says. So this entire process of epidermalization where you become something because of your colour is a very massive phenomenon in *Black Skin White Masks* as the very title suggests that it is an act of appropriation, a constant act of appropriation that he do as a black person in France. You have a black skin but you put on a white mask in order to so appropriate in certain kind of agency, certain kind of privilege that is only accorded to the white population.

And of course that appropriation can only be a misappropriation. It can only be an inadequate

appropriation as Fanon keeps reminding us. So for instance, if another main instances in that particular book, I am sure you remember what Fanon says is when a black person speaks very fluent French, the obvious question that comes to him is how did he pick up French so well. How did he speak French so well? His obvious assumption is the black person should not be able to speak French in the first place.

So any act of speaking French must be an act of inadequate appropriation and that constructive quality about appropriation is never lost sight off. However, there are certain other constructive qualities which are sort of very conveniently effaced away. The white man's domination or white man's superiority, I mean these are more heavily constructed categories but that particular construct is very easily and effectively effaced away and no one asks those questions that how come the white man becomes superior in the first place.

So these questions remain unasked where as the question of the black man's appropriation are heavily and massively asked, fraught at the colonial setting. So *Black Skin White Masks* becomes quite interestingly a very good example of psychological drama, psychological trauma in the colonial setting where this constant act, this constant anxiety to appropriate becomes a condition for the colonized person, for the colonized subject seeking to appropriate, a certain cultural coordinates which, you know, are markers of privilege agency and authority.

So that is a very important text that we studied extensively for this particular course. And in a very interesting way, this dialoguing with Orwell's *Shooting an Elephant* because in that essay, Orwell is talking about the crisis of being a white man, where it is also an act of appropriation demanded of the white man. So there are certain structural similarities that you can find between the Orwell essay and the Fanon book, *Black Skin White Masks*.

So they belong to different cultural conditions and they speak is subjugated, the very difference for Orwell as white man who is notionally, theoretically a genetic and for Fanon, this black man who is constantly anxious appropriate, the cultural or the proper coordinates of the culture, the proper genetic coordinates which will give him or conform privilege on to him.

So and then we look at something like Judith Butler's Gender Trouble which is very profoundly postmodernist and poststructuralist way of looking at culture and culture appropriation especially when it comes to gender. So gender for Butler becomes a verb, an act of becoming, undercoming, rebecoming, etc. and is the textual quality about gender but also and equally there is a phenomenal and experiential quality about gender. The Butler never loses sight off. So I mean, this is what Hacking talks about when he appreciates Butler.

And says the Butler actually makes an effort to move away from a purely constructionist perspective and offers a more experiential perspective and more complex perspective which takes into account the entire phenomenon of becoming and undercoming and rebecoming when it comes to gender identity. So gender specially if remember the sections on the drag, the sections and performativity, the section on parody and prestige may be studied quite extensively.

Those become very important sections, very alive and animated sections which help us in terms of understanding how gender is going is going to configure, reconfigure and deconfigure and different kinds of cultural settings. So gender trouble becomes a phenomenal, a seminal text for understanding of cultural preparation through active gendering and regendering and degendering. So the entire verb quality of gender is something that Butler constantly highlights and that is what makes that particular text profoundly poststructuralist in quality.

So it is the work web, it draws in poststructuralism, it draws in the postmodernism and looks at real cultural phenomenon such as gender, gendering, etc. And the classifications have come, the rein and the classifications that are accorded with certain kinds of gender behaviour. Right, so now when you look at postmodernism, it does mention postmodernism, so this is a good time to obviously mention Lyotard whose book, the Post Modern Condition is something that we dealt with extensively in this particular course.

So that book, the Post Modern Condition is really a prophetic book in the sense that it looks the nature of knowledge, how knowledge changes for the post modern condition and knowledge becomes more micro in quality where the public space disappears entirely and what we have instead are different kinds of micro public spaces where language games are enacted and in a

way it is very prophetic essay because that is exactly what we experienced today, there is no public space in a proper sense of the word.

What we have instead of different virtual micro spaces which can trigger conversations, which can trigger dialogues, which can trigger controversies and which can become viral in quality and what viral is quite important because that has a starkly pathological quality about it but when you use the word viral for virtual reality, we will use the word viral for social medium today. We do not necessary make it, it can often come with a positive connotation, a positive attribute.

Something goes viral means something becomes phenomenally popular, something gets spread across communities. It is like a spread of a disease but it could be a good disease, it could be a good knowledge disease, what people get to know certain things. But it is very interesting entanglement of a negative pathological connotation and a positive informative connotations. So these 2 kinds of connoted categories, connoted registers keep getting mixed in the word viral and has something that Lyotard seems to anticipate in the post modern condition.

But apart from that it is also very important book to look at signs, to look at how signs become discursive and how the nature of science changes to the post modern condition where the entire miniaturization of machines, machines become miniaturized, become more and more micro, more and more metronomic in quality and is entire atomization of machines, entire miniaturization of machines becomes partly post modern condition for Lyotard.

It is very important book to understand postmodernism and it draws a literary example, those of us who are from literary backgrounds would find the book extremely useful and helpful because towards end of the book, if you remember it gives the contrast, the opposite contrast but enjoys and prose and it talks about how in prose, there is this residual lingering of a narrative architecture.

But when it comes to joys, especially when it comes to feeling and swag, it does very well with the narrative architecture all together and offers a very post modernist kind of a performative architecture and the ends, it is very important note when he says that postmodernism is

something which actually comes before modernism. So postmodernism is something which is constantly performative.

So in that sense, it is a style which will never go out, which will never end. Is not really a temporal category per se.? It is more of a stylistic category for Lyotard where he says that anything which comes before the modern is actually postmodern before everything becomes fossilized into a form, fossilized into a structure, that act of finding a structure, the act of finding a form that is what postmodernism is all about.

The act of searching for a form, the act of looking for a form, that is postmodernism or postmodernist aesthetics for Lyotard. So in a way it is a very useful book for cultural studies as well as for literary studies and those of us interested in postmodernism as a movement, as a cultural phenomenon, so that is one of the seminal books that we have covered hopefully with some degree of attention for this particular course.

Now there is series of other texts that we have covered and for instance we just finished looking at Bell Hooks Understanding Patriarchy which like Butler, like Fanon, like Orwell constantly highlights experientiality of patriarchy or being subjected to patriarchy, being so a sufferer under patriarchy. And more interestingly, it moves away from the battlefield of binaries, it moves away from this men versus women kind of a binary where it looks a men being the oppressors, the women be the victims of patriarchy.

It moves away from the blunt binaristic understanding of patriarchy. It looks patriarchy as a system, as a discursive, experiential social system which finds us collaborators and finds us participants more men as well as women and Hooks talks about quite clearly. She talks about how it is not really biologically determined. Patriarchy system is a cultural system, it is a constructed system which becomes experiential in quality due to acts of internalization, due to little rituals in internalization.

But the point to remember that Hooks constantly reminds us is the fact that it is a system which is constructed and participated and presumed by men as well as women. So if we are to question

patriarchy, we must take a more collaborative approach. So Hooks appears quite critical of those brands of feminism which looks at men as enemies, which looks at men as the other, as someone outside the movement of patriarchy.

So patriarchy if it is to be dismantled, if it is to be deconstructed as a system, as a text, as a narrative, as an experience, as a social phenomenon, then we must be together, we must look at how men suffer patriarchy as well, how men who abuse in entirely patriarchy, how they were abused in their own terms, how this entire idea of psychologization affects men quite profoundly when they become perpetrators of patriarchy as well.

So even victims of patriarchy as well as perpetrators of patriarchy, they are psychologically affected by patriarchy and Hooks makes what clear the patriarchy is a disease. So she talks about the pathological quality about patriarchy, how there is a pathologization which happens due to acts of internalization. So when you internalize something, you become pathologized by patriarchy.

So in that sense, patriarchy is a disease, is a social disease which must be critiqued but now to critique, we must address the question, the question of patriarchy which goes beyond the binary of men versus women and that is something that Hooks constantly reminds to us. So what are things which you may have noticed in this particular course is that most of the thinkers, most of the text that we have studied, they tend to move away, they tend to advocate a non-binaristic understanding of cultural and non-binaristic understanding of gender, power, authority, etc.

And instead offers a more collaborative but more entangled and more dialectical approach to these things. So that is one of the key things that in cultural studies we must remind ourselves constantly. If we fall in trap of binary, if we fall into the trap of the dualistic understanding of how power works, how nature works, how culture works, how patriarchy works, how language works, then we end up replicating those power structures.

We end up replicating this patriarchal, father eccentric discursive structures which are designed to promote certain orders of humans, above and above certain others. So for instance does a

critique that Homi Bhaba does to advertise when you say sides understanding of orientalism is phenomenal, is only seminal understandings of the entire idea of colonialism, etc. But there is a theoretical (()) (23:13) inside.

There is a theoretical era inside never quite gets over from and that is the era of binary. So he looks at the entire orient versus occident binary which does not quite move, which does not quite come into collusion or collision. So this entire idea of collusion and collision is something that Bhaba was extremely interested in as a poststructuralist. So he is more interested in looking at how authority, power, these things can become quite collusive in quality, how the colonized as well as the colonizer can participate and co-consume these things in different degree.

So this entire idea of co-consumption becomes important because when he takes that theory of Bhaba and put in to Orwell Shooting an Elephant, the entire essay becomes an act of co-consumption, right. It is not just the colonizer consuming power or authority, it is also the colonized who becomes consumer of that same kind of authority, same kind of patriarchal expansion that this imperialist enterprise.

And how that narrative is set out for everyone to co-consume wherein that therein lays the real rich quality in Bhaba's essay where he offers, the very poststructuralist idea of Bhaba authority, especially in the colonial setting. So and then we did something like Hannah Arendt's The Human Condition which is a very important text in terms of looking at labour, work, power and also the idea of public space and private space.

So the entire idea of the private space becoming more important than the public space is something that Arendt keeps talking about throughout this book. And that we can connect that to the idea of public space and private space at the end of Lyotard's The Post Modern Condition where he takes up, depicts a born with (()) (24:51) understand your public space which Lyotard critiques because according to Lyotard that understanding of public space, it presupposes certain kind of unity.

It privileges a certain kind of unities, certain kind of narrative which can quickly become

hegemonic in quality and the whole idea, the whole business of postmodernism if it can may be considered to be a business in very benign terms is to critique that kind of hegemonization, that kind of a dominant discursive formation which can quickly extend from this (()) (25:22) understanding of the public space according to Lyotard.

Okay, so these are the many texts we have covered in the particular, in this particular course and of course, I mean, we talked about different kinds of theoretical frameworks, how are the different theoretical frameworks can fit into this course, how study, as a branch of study, cultural studies is essentially interdisciplinary in quality withdrawn different kinds of disciplines, psychology, language studies, gender studies, literary studies, colonial studies, etc. feminism.

So all these things come into play a very richly in cultural studies and make it a course, make it something which we can relate to in our real life. So that is one of the key things that I would like you to take from this particular course and of course then we have one more course, one more text to finish after this where we look at very postmodern condition, post 9/11.

How 9/11 constantly reminds us of this (()) (26:18) and how that particular Samuel Crum becomes a spectacle not just of consumption but of phobia and the center thing entanglement of phobia and spectacle phobia and consumption where he not just become traumatized, he becomes a traumatophilic in quality. You love trauma, you love to consume trauma. It is something which Zizek talks about very extensively in Welcome to the Desert of the Real which is obviously an illusion to the Matrix movies.

After seeing the Matrix movies, those are films which constantly question this borderline between reality and virtuality. No one quite know when a reality ends and the virtual world begins. So everything can be virtual, everything can be real at any given point of time and that need mapping is almost impossible in the world we live in today. So we can see Zizek extending the Lyotard in understanding of postmodernism in, it is likely more dystopia in ways perhaps but that is again a very real condition.

That is a condition we can readily relate to in the way we live our world today. So this overview,

the summary that I just tried to offer you today in this particular lecture is hopefully helpful in terms of looking at how we look at cultural studies, how we ought to look at cultural studies as a real phenomenon. Not just as a text, not just as an academic enterprise but as something which we can relate to in our daily lives quite readily in more ways than 1.

And again just going back to some of the key texts of your study for this particular course. So when you look at Orwell, when you look at Bhaba, when you look at Hannah Arendt, Bell Hooks, Foucault, Lyotard and series of other things, other texts and figures that we constantly have, eluded to, is very easy, I will mention again, is very easy to be seduced away but the grand narrative of construction series and that this is a paradox.

So you must be slightly comic in a way that we must be quite aware of. The constant looking at a textuality of culture, we constantly questioning the constructed quality of culture. There is this tendency, there is this danger, there is this risk of reification which can operate in a reverse way that we say that everything is textualized, everything is constructed and we cannot rethink in terms of any other prison, any other perspective and that is exactly where Ian Hacking's book, *The Social Construction of What* comes in very handy.

It is extremely important book which constantly reminds us that in this entire idea of this construction series, we have to look at everything as a construct, is a fallacy because that does away with the experientiality, with the robust and rich understanding of culture as a phenomenon, as a lived experience, as something which you viscerally live, you inhabit, you internalize, you psychologise, you suffer, you are affected by.

And if you are looking at everything as a text, as a dry text, as a dry textual (()) (29:06), then obviously you are doing a disservice to the entire phenomenon of culture. So this phenomenality of culture is something that we need to be very constantly aware of. The phenomenality and the textuality like I said a little while ago, they are not ideological opposites. They do not undercut each other.

They complement each other. They supplement each other in more ways than one, especially

when looking at culture as a complex phenomenon. Right, so this is what we have covered so far. This is the, so the inherent fundamental message that one may draw from this particular course. This is the takeaway from the course as you will if you will. And of course, the different texts do it differently.

The different texts we have covered for this particular course have different takes on culture. But there seem to be a commonality and I have been quite careful in terms of selecting the text because there is a commonality, there is a thread that we can see connecting all those texts in terms of how these texts are looking at this entanglement of discursivity and experientiality as a very complex phenomenon, right.

And not relying just on one and disregarding the other. So for instance when we look at Bell Hooks' essay Understanding Patriarchy is quite anecdotal in quality. It constantly draws on personal experiences, personal trauma, personal memory, personal encounters but at the same time, it keeps locating those encounters, locating those events in a bigger narrative of culture.

The bigger narrative of patriarchy which this particular essay, Understanding Patriarchy sets all to define, describe and dismantle as Frantz Fanon's Black Skin White Masks is a profoundly personal essay. It draws autobiographical elements, it draws a different kinds of experiences that the person, the subject has had in different colonial conditions. However, those experiences are located and mapped on to this entire discursive phenomenon of colonialism which never lost sight of.

So again we are looking at this very interesting balance between the experientiality, the lived reality and the textual discursivity which constitutes culture. And this is something which we must be constantly aware of. Because you know cultural studies is not just a text book, it is not just academic enterprise, it is not just a classroom, it is something that we live, inhabit, consume, breathe everyday whether we are aware of it or not.

And this particular course in a way is a very modest attempt to make us aware of how culture happens, how culture takes place, how cultures internalize, how the culture coordinates change.

And that change is something that we must be constantly mindful of specially when we look at cultural studies as a spectrum that we, series of text, events, phenomenon, reality, virtuality, etc. that we are interested in as college students of this particular discipline.

So with that I conclude this particular lecture and move on to the Slavoj Zizek's Welcome to the Dessert of the Real in the next lecture which should be our final text for this course. And then we will spend some time looking at Dick Hebdige's Understanding Cultural Studies because that is one of the pioneer studies in culture or cultural studies, one of the seminal texts, one of the seminal scholarship realm in cultural studies where you must be aware of every wind off this particular course.

So thank you for your attention and I will see you in the next lecture. Thank you.