**Literature, Culture and Media**
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**Lecture – 32**
**Media and Culture I**

Dear friends, welcome to the second module of the seventh week.

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- By the time we enter 20$^{th}$ century, media has taken up a shape and possesses a certain appeal and credibility.
- It has been internalized as a daily habit; as well as a lure for people.
- Interconnections between media and culture can be academically established.
- Media and Cultural theorists and scholars have long debated whether media shapes culture or is media shaped by cultural practices and ideas.

We have seen that by the time we enter the 20th century, media has already taken up a shape and it also already possesses a certain appeal as well as a credibility among the people. It has become a cultural force, it has been internalised as a daily habit among the masses and it also acts as a lure and has started forming public opinion. Interconnections between media and culture also come to be academically debated around this time. Media and cultural theorist and the scholars have long debated whether media shapes culture or media is shaped by cultural practices and ideas.

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Symbiotic Relationship between Media and Culture

- The relationship between the two is circular, symbiotic or two-directional
- *Culture shapes media*: transmission of cultural messages, ideas, symbols through mass media corresponds to the dominant modes of culture
- Often leads to the acceptance of these messages and their subsequent dissemination and reinforcement
- *Media content shapes culture*: mass media plays an instrumental role in constructing perceptions of social reality, interpersonal relationships, symbolic and representational meanings

We can say that there exists a symbiotic relationship between media and culture. Culture shapes media because it transmits the cultural messages, ideas and symbols through mass media and media also corresponds to the dominant modes of culture. It leads to the acceptance of these cultural messages and their subsequent dissemination and reinforcement among the people. We can also say that media content shapes culture. Because mass media particularly plays an instrumental role in constructing perceptions of social reality, interpersonal relationships, symbolic and representational meanings as well as formulating a strong public opinions over certain debates.

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- Kellner (1995) argues that mass media deeply influences people's perceptions of their world, social groups, and even themselves.
- Mass media creates a "common culture for the majority of individuals in many parts of the world today" that "helps shape the prevalent view of the world and deepest values" (Kellner 1995: 1).
- Number of models explain media's influence in society, but they don't usually explain the role of culture in processes of how meaning is made
- Stuart Hall (1997) explains the crux of these models:
- Messages contain "codes"(meanings) which are "encoded" by senders to transmit them to receivers, who then "decode" them, thus producing meaning.

Kellner has argued that mass media deeply influences people's perception of the world, social groups and even themselves. Mass media is set to create a common culture for the majority of people in most of the parts of the world today which helps shape the prevalent view of the world and also helps to give a particular shape to the deepest values of the people. We find that in the beginning of the 20th century and towards the middle of it, various theories emerged to explain the influence of the media. They do not however necessarily explain the role of culture in processes of how meaning is made but a brief review of these theories regarding how media takes shape and influences people will help us to understand their role in the formulation of culture.
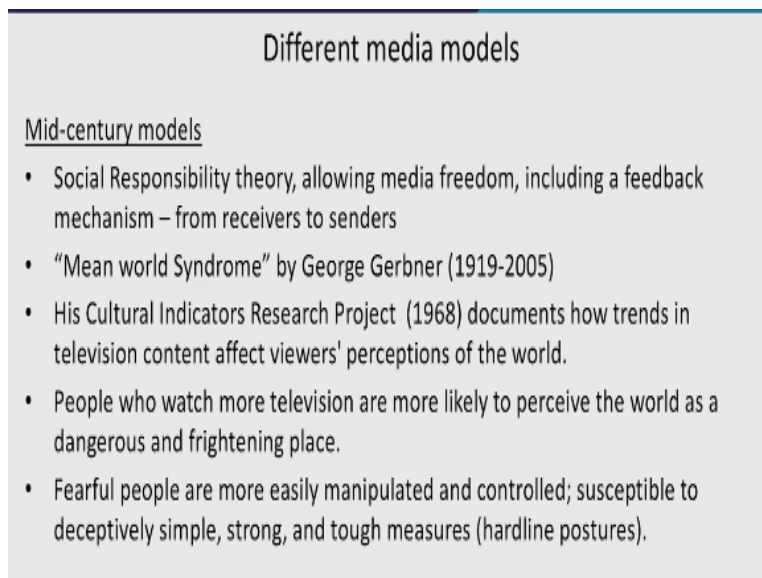
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When we start talking about different media models, the first model which can be referred to is known as the 'magic bullet' or the 'hypodermic needle'; it became popular in 1920s and 1930s in the US society. The name is given because it affects the people directly in the same way a bullet affects a person or a hypodermic needle injects certain substance into the patient. So, because of its direct and severe impact on the people, this name is giving.

There is a very interesting story behind it. On one of the Halloween eves around this time, the radio broadcast in various stations in the US were stopped to announce a breaking news that Martians are invading earth. Even though it was a part of the radio version of H.G.Well's famous

novel, *War of the Worlds*, this sudden announcement in the form of a breaking news generated mass hysteria and confusion among the people.

People came out on their streets, people started purchasing the daily consumerist items in a panic but it supported this idea that mass media may have a direct and immediate effect on the audience akin to the effects of an injection. Though later on we find that this particular media model was largely discredited because it gives too much of an influence to this idea that audience is basically passive. And therefore, it assumes that messages are interpreted according to the intention of the sender which has been proved to be not accurate.

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Soon this idea of 'hypodermic needle or magic bullet was replaced by various mid-century models which try to incorporate social responsibility. In the media management they talked about allowing certain freedom to media but they also try to include a feedback mechanism, so that the receivers can also pass on certain ideas to those people who are responsible for transmitting this message using different type of media.

A discordant voice is heard in the form of George Gerbner with this phrase of 'Mean world Syndrome'. This particular media theory became popular in late 1960s. This theory was propounded in the context of TV programs however, we can say that even in today's media in the beginning of the 21st century, this particular model is still correct. His project on cultural

indicators research documented how trends in television content affect the perceptions of the viewers about the world they are living in.

Gerbner suggested that people who watch more television are more likely to perceive the world as a dangerous and therefore it threatening and a frightening place. And since too much viewership of television channels generates a sense of certain fear in the psyche of the people, these people can be easily manipulated and controlled because a fearful person is obviously more susceptible to deceptively simple, strong yet tough measures and hard line postures. And therefore, we find that Gerbner has linked too much viewership of TV program with the gullibility of the audience which can be manipulated.

In comparison to Gerbner, we find that other mid-century models were still talking about the social responsibility of media.

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Another theory which we can refer to is a two-step flow which says that media works not directly but through the influence of the opinion leaders. It tried to differentiate between the elite and the mass media and particularly to the example of those types of media which talk about the advances in sciences. It was suggested that not everybody can understand scientific communication. So, certain people would understand it and disseminate the ideas further and therefore it is necessary to distinguish between the elite and the mass media. So it put a lot of

emphasis on the role of those people who can be perceived as opinion leaders, people who are already holding a leadership position in the structure of the world and its organisations. This idea is considered to be pertinent in today's media which we would discuss further in one of the later modules.

Another model of media which we can refer to is known as the 'Agenda-setting model'. It suggests that mass media can exert a lot of influence on the people through repeatedly covering a particular message or by underscoring a particular tone in a message. So the repeated coverage of a particular message or a particular tone formulates public opinion about various issues related with politics, economy and cultural issues. It is also a very relevant argument and we will also come back in detail to this idea in one of the later modules.

The third model is known as 'Uses and Gratifications model'. It emphasises connectivity and reciprocity in communication and its consumption. It assumes that audience is active and largely autonomous and looks at why do people use media and what do they use it for instead of focusing only on treating audience as passive recipients. It is a positivistic model in comparison to the other two and all these models are relevant in the context of the 21st century electronic media. So all these models we would be revisiting again.

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- Hodkinson's model (2011): reciprocal relationship between media and culture—the role of social and cultural determiners and environment as a component that links audiences' responses to media messages.
- Weist's Media Model of Culture
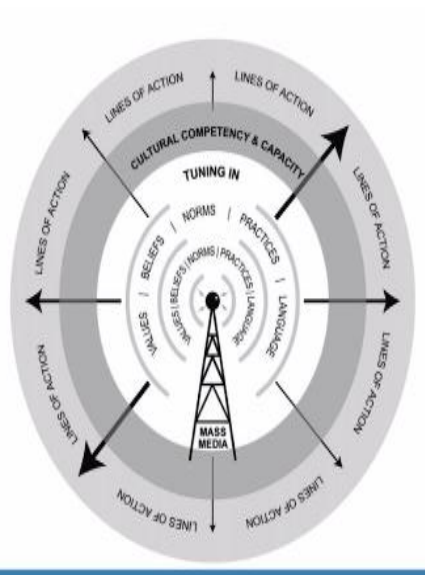
Another model which we can refer to is Hodkinson's model which also talks about the reciprocal relationship between media and culture. We can find that the technological developments and the subsequent and consequent media developments in the 21st century have changed the way in which the modelling is done in the field of mass communication. So Hodkinson's model also talks about the role of social and cultural determiners and an environment is a component that links audience responses to media messages.

This figure which is being shown on the right hand side, top of this screen is Weist's media model of culture.

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In this media model, we find that the role of mass media is explained from the perspective of the diffusion of culture; it suggests that mass media is loaded with cultural messages and these cultural messages are used by audiences in turn to understand as well as to express certain meanings. According to him, culture is a shared system but audiences consume different kinds of messages and different quantities of those messages and the kinds and quantities they use and they consume is incorporated in different ways of their lives. The tower in this figure in the model represents how cultural messages are broadcast via mass media text and the fluctuating thickness of the arrows refers to different quantities of messages that individual tunes in. This model assumes that culture is transmitted through various socialisation, institutions and

processes. And media is influential because it can easily reach people and can spread various messages quickly and simultaneously to an enormous number of audiences.

The broadcast analogy represents the omnipresent in intangible nature of culture and media particularly in the context of the 21st century; it also assumes, which is also a very much contemporary worldview, that culture is fragmented. It explains differences and inconsistencies in values and beliefs.

So this model also takes up a post-modernist approach towards the modelling in the area of mass communication. The dark grey circle in this figure is symbolic of the 'filter' that is the cultural competency in capacity of individuals to understand and respond to the messages. The outer circle in this model represents the lines of actions based on these filters. The cultural messages which supply information about those values and beliefs and practices which are culturally valuable and therefore they are acceptable.

So we would find that in a way this model also suggests what type of a normative behaviour is understood and appreciated by the audience. These two models have been developed in the 21st century and therefore they catered to the demands and needs of the contemporary media.

- These models do not quite address recent changes in the media landscape.
- The World Wide Web tools that emphasize usability and availability of user- generated content such as YouTube, Wikipedia, and Twitter
- diminishing technology costs, and the immense popularity of social media
- All these changes brought about by Internet and its widespread reach have made it possible for people to create and send messages to massive audiences
- This new media landscape ensures that the traditional forms of mass media no longer have absolute power as the gatekeepers of cultural messages.

In the earlier models, we have seen that the recent changes in the media landscape have not been incorporated. The latest world wide web tools which have emphasised usability and availability of user have generated different types of contents like YouTube, Wikipedia, Twitter and so on. And therefore we find that the cost of the technology is continually diminishing, people are able to use it more and more with better ease. And therefore the social media has become immensely popular.

All these changes have been brought about by Internet and its widespread reach has made it possible for people to create their own content and send it immediately to a massive audience. This new media landscape and shows that the traditional forms of mass media no longer have absolute power as the gatekeepers of cultural messages.

So, we find that the way media is enacted and is shaped also is shaping our cultural consciousness and our participation in different cultural modes; it is with this background that we begin our discussion of culture, how do we understand the idea of culture through the prism of media as we have discussed it till this point.

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**Understanding Culture: Prism of Media**

- Acquired a new meaning in the 1960s and 70s
- Previously it was associated with art/literature/classical music etc.
- To have culture meant to possess a certain taste for particular kinds of artistic endeavor
- Anthropologists use the term in a broader sense: forms of life and of social expressions
  - The way people behave while eating/talking with each other; becoming sexual partners; interact at work/educational places etc.
  - Engage in ritualized social behavior, family gatherings/festivals
  - The regularities/procedures/rituals of human life in communities

We find that around 1960s and 70s, the word culture acquired a new meaning. Priorly, it was associated with literature, art, classical music etc., and to have culture meant to possess a certain type of a taste for particular kinds of artistic endeavour. Anthropologist started to use this term in a broader sense. They used it to denote forms of life and of social expressions which included so many things, including the way people behave while eating, talking with each other, cooking choosing and becoming their sexual partners, interactions at the workplace, the way the educational systems function in a particular system, how do we engage in ritual, social behaviour, in family gatherings, how do we celebrate our festivals and also the regularities of these procedures and rituals of human life in communities came to be understood as culture.

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- Marxism viewed culture as political
- Means of domination, assuring the rule of one class/group over another: patriarchy/race/colonization etc.
- Also as means of resistance, to such domination: a way of articulating oppositional point of view to those in dominance
- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer in "Dialectic of Enlightenment" view mass culture - the culture of TV/radio/films/cheap paperbacks etc -as tools of domination
- A way for Capitalism to offer ephemeral gratification to people condemned to lives of work – not only physical but anything which is repetitive and not linked directly with explicit goals or tangible objectives

In the beginning of the 20th century, we find that it was this idea of culture which was popularised particularly by the Marxist thought which viewed culture basically as being a political entity. It viewed culture as a means of domination assuring the role of one class or group over other for example, the thought of patriarchy, the thought of a particular race being superior to others, the idea that certain nations are to be colonised by certain races.

At the same time, we find that the idea of culture is a form of resistance to these forms of domination also became an accepted interpretation of the word culture. As a means of resistance it came to be accepted as a way of articulating a point of view which was in opposition to the dominant arguments of a particular culture. I would particularly refer to the work of Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer who have written in their essay, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the mass culture that is the culture of TV, radio, films, cheap paperbacks etc., works as a tool of domination.

According to these writers, culture and these types of mass media are a way for capitalism to offer ephemeral gratification to people who are condemned to lives of work. And by work, they do not only mean physical work but anything which is repetitive in nature and not link directly with either explicit goals or tangible objectives. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, these types of cultural products are a way to hide the ugliness of the capitalist exploitation.

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- British philosophers Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson viewed culture as a means of resistance to capitalism
- Illiteracy was a way of keeping poor working classes away from intellectual instruments that might impel them to rebellion
- Literacy in the form of clandestine pamphlets/underground newspapers was a way of maintaining/nurturing alternative perspectives to those demanded by the progress of industrial capitalism and the submission of the population to factory labor.
- Red Revolutions in Russia and China; Indian resistance to British colonial forces – *Gadar* newspaper in USA and *Chaand* magazine in India

British philosophers like Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and E.P. Thompson viewed culture as a means of resistance to capitalism. According to them if illiteracy was a way of keeping poor working class people away from the intellectual instruments, so that they are not attracted towards any idea of rebellion, then literacy itself can also be used as a form of resistance.

In the form of pamphlets which may be clandestine, the underground newspapers etc., we can think of a way of maintaining and nurturing alternative perspectives to those which are demanded by the capitalist forces for the progress of industrial capitalism and also for continuing the submission of the large tracts of population to factory labour. So we find that in almost all the countries in the beginning of the 20th century, media and culture became interdependent ways of understanding resistance.

In the red revolutions of Russia and China, books and pamphlets were used to create a particular type of mind set among the people, they help the cause of resistance. In Indian resistance also to the British colonial forces we find that the media of print had a major role to play. On the east coast of the USA, we find that the newspaper *Gadar* was started and it was followed by the publication of a magazine with the name of *Chaand* in India. The newspaper *Gadar* as well as this magazine *Chaand* was circulated in the clandestine fashion, so that people could understand the atrocities being perpetuated by the colonial empire. So we find that there is a shifting worldview of the people.

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## Shifting Worldview

- In these changing definitions and perspectives, the continued thread of technology – its impact on social life, media and market forces can also be perceived.
- Also, impact of printing press, electricity, chain-line production on literature, media, entertainment, social life, public entertainment
- Changing perspectives on gender, ethnicity and race etc. also run parallel
- Links can not be ignored as they collectively shape culture and our interpretations of it

In these changing definitions and perspectives, we find that there are certain interconnected forces and they are the thread of technology as well as the impact of technology on media and at the same time, market forces which can also be perceived. So we can say that the impact of printing press, electricity, chain-line production on literature, media, entertainment, social life and as well as different forms of public entertainment changed our perspective on various contemporary issues including gender, ethnicity, race, colonialism etc.

And these interlinks cannot be ignored as they collectively shape our culture and the way we interpret our culture. So we can say that the linkages between media and culture are inextricably established, they are independent as well as interdependent shaping each other and also being shaped by the other. We would continue this discussion about how the notions of culture have developed further within the framework of different critical theories. Thank you.