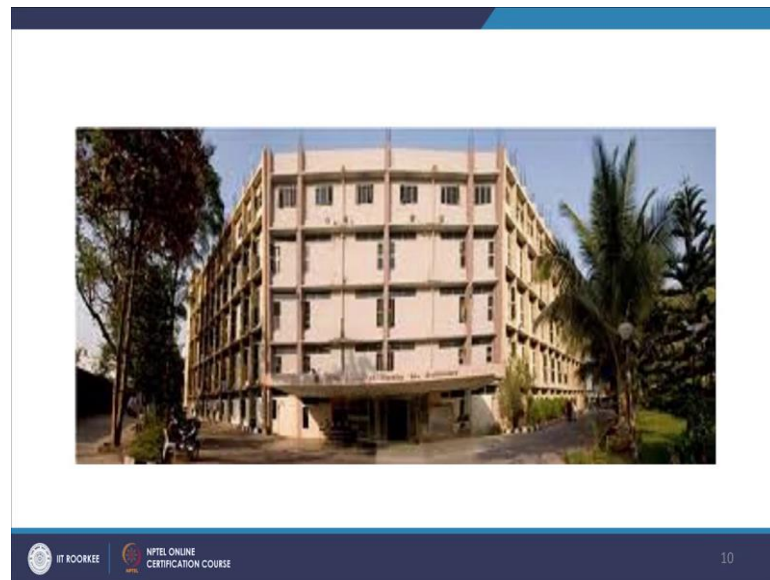


**Culturally Responsive Built Environments**  
**Dr. Ram Sateesh Pasupuleti**  
**Department of Architecture and Planning**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**

**Lecture - 01**  
**A Place**

Welcome to the course: Culturally Responsive Built Environments; I am Ram Sateesh Pasupuleti, I am trained as an architect.

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And did my architecture from Hyderabad and been working in different places in different parts of the world, including UK, Sweden, Turkey and Cyprus. And this course is actually a compilation of all my work experiences on understanding of the world and habitats; and that is how I frame kind of larger umbrella of all my understanding of the built environments from the cultural perspective. So, that is why I title this particular course as Culturally Responsive Built Environments. So, this is the first lecture of the series and which I am titling this with 'a place'.

So, we start our discussion with the basic understanding of what is a place, because generally we, the built environment professionals, we talk of anything which happens in a place and space and there is a huge jargon between and a thin difference of understanding a space and place. So, this lecture, the very first part of the series will help

the participants to understand the basic fundamental understanding and the theory behind the place. So, understanding places is a very important component.

So, I would like to take back almost 15 to 17 years before, where I actually started this journey. If you look at these photographs, this is where my journey has started.

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In fact, anyone who is in the architectural training so obviously, they had big dreams about becoming an architect or constructing huge buildings, earning a lot of money. So, this was around 2002, when I was doing my bachelors thesis in earthquake affected areas in Gujarat. So, I come cross these two photographs which actually changed my direction of thinking towards culture.

So, the right hand side photograph- what you see on the right hand side is all the houses constructed in Latur earthquake recovery, which was from 1993 Marathwada earthquake; follow up on huge massive rehabilitation program taken place in the Marathwada region. And on the left hand side, you see the geodesic domes which were constructed in the Gujarat earthquake recovery in 2002.

So the punching line of these photographs is all these houses built in Latur, they are all unoccupied. Even after 15 years-20 years, they are all still unoccupied, and one can imagine how much investment has gone waste; what kind of thinking has gone waste. So, this is the very first question I got in my mind. So, why? Is there any problem with

the technology? Is there any problem it's earthquake proof; it's concrete structures- brick and concrete structures? What went wrong? This was the very initial question which came in my mind.

So, then this is how I started my journey into the culture. I found some of the reasons while interacting with the people; why they have rejected these houses or why they are moving away from these places and building on their own? So, this is where the answers, the responses from the people and the communities came that they are not matching with their livelihood requirements, they are not matching with their cultural requirements.

So, this is an eye opener for me as a student of architecture that how important is cultural dimension in making a built environment. Till that point, I was only thinking about something technical means could provide a better support for making better houses, but I was wrong. It is the cultural dimension, how we can understand people and how their behaviours, and how they respond to the new things, and how they create meanings to represent themselves. This is an eye opener for me and this is how I started my journey.

And then after working in India for sometime, I found a course of Masters in International Studies in Vernacular Architecture, which was run by Centre for Vernacular Architecture Studies: one of the oldest centres in the world which is in Oxford Brookes University. I was very much impressed by Paul Oliver's work, who has compiled the encyclopaedia of vernacular architecture of the world.

And he has written a lot of contributions in the African vernacular architecture, signs and symbols, the dwellings; what not he is one of the.

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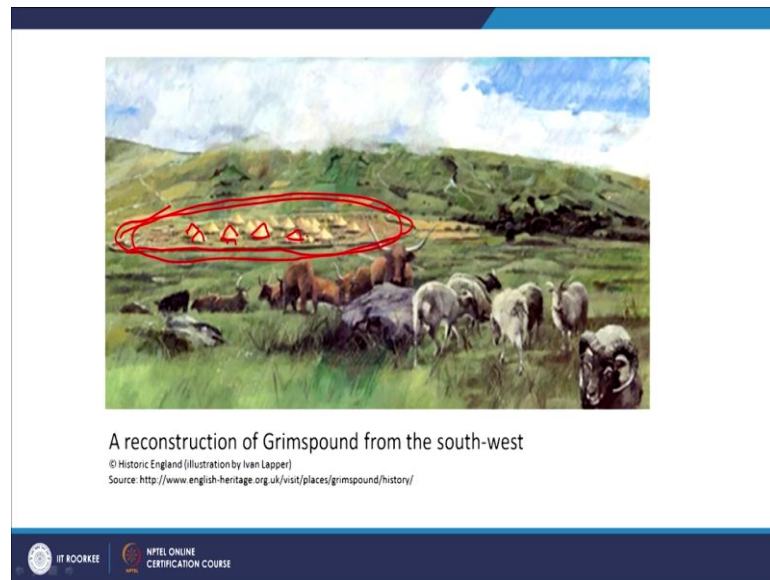


So, I happened to, I was fortunate enough to work with him and during my course, so, we been involved in certain projects which involve the ancient settlements, culturally responsive settlements and some of the conflict cities; so given a very wide exposure in the course. So, in the photographs which you see here on the left hand side, you can notice a huge stone ring; it is a massive boundary wall. And these are one of the ancient remains of the old man's habitat. So, they are prehistoric settlements somewhere in dark mode in the England, south west of England and it is referred as Grimspound and which dates from the late Bronze Age about 1450 to 700 BC.

So, here what you notice is a very, it is about 150 metres in diameter and you can see small houses here. So, there are group of about 24 houses; a stone houses the zoomed up version looks like this on the right hand side; so what does this photograph tell? This photograph gives it is a simple circle, but it has lot of message to the present community- a lot of message.

So, if you see why these people were living closely to each other and why they are bounded with a territorial boundary having a fence off. So, what could be the reasons behind it? So, these all takes back towards our understanding of the basic needs. So here is an artist impression illustration by Ivan Lapper; you can find the image from the English heritage.

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So, you can say he developed an image of how the ancient men have built his habitat and his circular shape conical huts here. So, which is also used for a defensive purpose because is also protecting from the wild animals and they are also living closely together and it is representing a sense of belonging for the people and for their community.

And it is not only creating a sense of place, it is also referred as the territorial instinct; a sense of place is often referred to be as a territorial instinct. And some of the scientific experts, anthropologist, ethnographers and the sociologist also argue that it is a survival instinct. So, it is not only that when we are making places; it is defining certain boundaries.

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A Sense of place is a territorial instinct and some argue that it is a survival instinct.  
(Rose, 1995:98).

Source: Rose, G. (1995) "Place and identity: a sense of place", in D. Massey and P. Jess (eds) *A Place in the World? Places, Cultures and Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 87-132.

- A geographic Location (Latitude and Longitude)
- A Material form (Physical Features of Natural and Built Environments)
- The Meanings and Values people/Communities invest in them

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Now, how the place can be defined? One: it has obviously referred as territorial instinct and people do develop their places as a part of their survival instincts. Now, broadly one can refer the places as a geographic location because a place is defined with certain latitude and longitude or it is defined by certain boundaries. So, that is the geographical part and the second one is a material form which is about a physical environment, a physical feature of natural and built environment.

Here I will explain to you, just imagine in the hills of Uttarakhand how do you find the houses? Obviously, the ecology and geography, the landscape itself gives certain meanings and people and the communities living over there trying to use their local resources to form their shelters. You can find the stone roofs, you can find the Dhajji walls and they are using the local resources.

Whereas, if you go to Gujarat you will find the bhungas in the desert landscape, you will find the circular shape bhungas. So, which means being in earthquake prone area, so the people started accommodating themselves with the locally available resources. So, the existing nature itself is forming a setting for their habitats, itself giving meanings for their place environments. So, the people living on a hill side, people living on a coastal side, people living on the desert landscapes, on plains; so each of the natural settings are itself forming a background for their habitats. So, which talks about the material form. In fact, if in the Uttarakhand hills if one can notice, they say there is a kind of a Hindi

*kahavat* where they call *Cheed* tress; if there are so many of *Cheed* trees people normally do not reside because they expect a lot of landslides.

So, what they do is they try to settle themselves in a much safer place though there are many hills. But still people apply their indigenous knowledge systems and they try to identify the appropriate lands, where they get a source of water, source of livelihood, source of farming and they try to identify for a safer places. You can find some of them on the midlands, some of them on the ridges, some of them on the bottom plains. So it is the man; how he applies the indigenous knowledge systems to protect himself from the calamities and to survive with his livelihood. The third important aspect is most important part.

It is not just a four walls and it is not just a layout, a linear layout or a circular layout of the physical environment; it is the meanings and the values, people and communities invest in them. And this investment takes time. How the meanings are created? They are not created in a day; it takes ages, it take some time a person is interacting with a particular process or a practice and then certain meaning are created and this is where the culture comes important.

Till now we are talking about a territorial boundary which defines with the geographical location or a boundary than the second one; we talk about the material form, how the physical features of natural and built environments are corresponding to each other, but here how a man creates his meanings. I will tell you a small example; now you have a fisherman in China, you have a fisherman in Kerala; you have a fisherman in Bangladesh. Now all of them are doing fishing; their basic occupation is fishing. But then how they are their boats are looking very different? The Chinese boat you can easily figure out and the Bengal fisherman boat is very different, and where as in Tamil Nadu you see a *kattamaram*. So each of them they are defining their identity.

So, this is how their meanings and values, their living practices will show some direction to establish certain meanings.

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*cultural geography*

Doreen Massey (1995) has argued that 'place' is a social construct. In her view, "we actively make places" (1995:48) and our ideas of place "are products of the society in which we live" (1995:50).

*Social Individual*

Massey, D. (1995) "The conceptualization of place", in D. Massey and P. Jess (eds) *A Place in the World?: Places, Cultures and Globalization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 45-85.

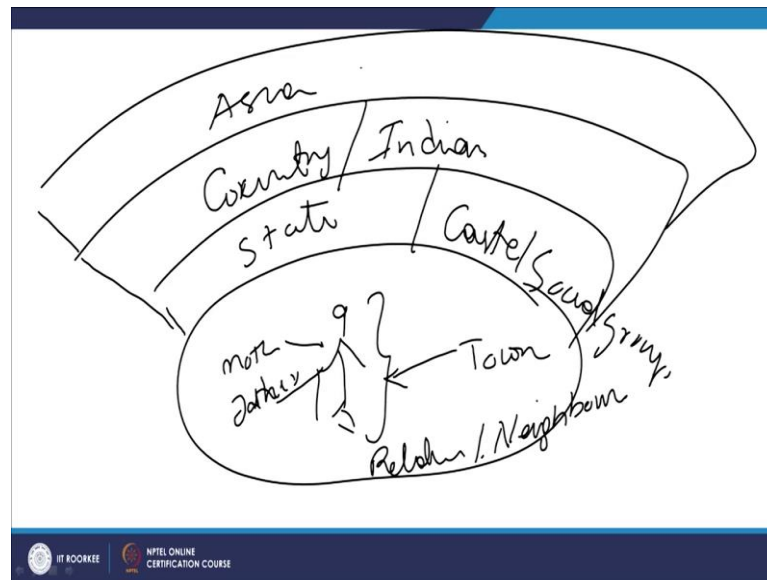
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When we talk about culture before coming to architecture; it is very much widely discussed by the cultural geographers in the field of cultural geography. So, I would like to refer with one of the famous personality in this field, Doreen Massey. She says that place is a social construct, see here what it means is, it is not just an individual interacting with the place; it is a process of how an individual becomes a social individual. So, we abide by some norms; we abide by certain understanding. So, it is I becomes we and we actively making places, we are making places and our ideas of place or products of the society in which we live.

So, here it is if you understand when I was born; I am always referred from my family: he is son of so and so. And now obviously, there are certain tags keep coming out. Now one of the important tag which.



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So now, I am an individual, now my mother, my father, they are associated with me. Then I am representing my town, and then here I am also relating to my relatives and my neighbours. So, that is giving me certain boundary. Now, I am expanding furthermore, I am relating to my state or maybe I am representing of some caste or a social group. Even further, I come little further, may be I am representing a country; I am an Indian. I would go even further, I am an Asian.

So, this is what we grow from a single family, individual, and then we are representing with the society and then we are growing bigger and bigger. Our attachments, our embodiedness with the society is growing bigger. So, on a similar note coming to the built environment; we say about how the practices because how the practices are passed on from generation to generation. In fact, it is a tradition which means it is just information, packets of information which pass from generation to generation.

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“Places are doubly constructed: most are built or in some way physically carved out. They are also interpreted, narrated, perceived, felt, understood, and imagined” (Gieryn, 2000:465)



Gieryn, T. (2000) "A Space for Place in Sociology", *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 463-496.

Women Helping to Build a Dwelling in Paro, Bhutan  
Photos Credit: Regina Mapau Lim

Women Enjoying a Buddhist Festival in Bhumtang

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So, here for example, you can see from Regina Mapau Lim’s work in Bhutan and Philippines; you can see a building practice is done in Paro; women helping to build a dwelling in Paro. So, the kind of three generations, these are the three generations of people sitting and they are participating in the building process, whether it could be rammed earth process or anything. So, they are participating; and in that participation process, the building skills are handed down to one generation to another generation and that is how one learn their skills and one learn their knowledge and that is how it is been transmitted. So, in the transmission process; obviously, there are certain things get modified due to time and technology.

And so here whereas, Gieryn refers places are doubly constructed most are built or in some way physically carved out. The most important part, how we can understand a place, they are interpreted, they are narrated, they are perceived, they are felt, they are understood and they are imagined.

So, just to give an example of how they are narrated; when I talk about my hometown I obviously, I refer to certain rituals, I refer to certain landmarks like when I talk my hometown about Nellore; I always refer to 13th century temple of Ranganathaswamy temple, which is a landmark of my town.

And when I talk about a practice of my community; we always say that we meet on a Pongal day, we meet in the burial ground and we, all the generations meet at the burial

ground and we clean all our ancestors cemeteries and then we exchange each of our ancestors' information and as well as their memories. So, this is how we exchange, because a burial ground is a place which we talk about some event to happen there, some play to happen there and similarly how it is interpreted?

Now, an object, how it is interpreted by different cultures. How for example, a red colour which is danger for certain communities, and for Chinese it is auspicious. And if someone is proposing, it also represents love; so how different cultures interpret and how they imagine the societies.

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Now, coming to one of the interesting part; I hope you are aware of the 'Cast Away', its an English movie and the actor name is Tom Hanks. Here the story is it is a very, I really thank the director and the writer who have written this particular story. Here it is very relevant to connect to a place. He was a courier person who met with the flight accident and Tom Hanks only surviving person who actually find himself in a lonely island, where no one was there and no human was living in that island; a small tiny island.

And then he lives there for almost 1500 days alone. Just imagine a person living in a small island with no human being and the whole story is all about how he makes his place. He invents fire. He because before, he used to just light the fire with a matchbox or any other electric equipment, but now he started inventing fire; I would say maybe discovered. Then he felt lonely he makes a small cave, he makes a small shelter for him

and he becomes a hunter; he started hunting fish, eating and then he is you know he is putting in the kind of fire oven and then he is making his food that is how he is making himself alive. Then the only thing missing was, he was not having any one to share.


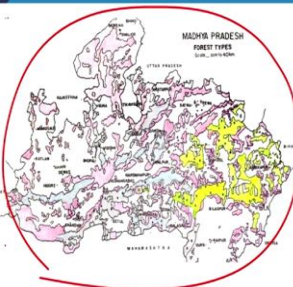
One day he found this character: a football delivered, it comes floating from the sea. Then he names him he, paints him like this and he names his as Wilson. He names his Wilson, he talks to him, he shouts at him, he loves him, he cares for him, he is his wife, he is his child, he is his mother. So, Wilson becomes a part of his life.

So, finally, after 4 years living in that island alone he becomes kind of a wild nomadic person. And then whenever he gets angry he throws Wilson out, but then he runs for him. You see here he is Wilson, he runs and he searches for him. So, finally after 1500 days, he finds a boat and he travels to the mainland.

So, it takes him for many days to find, but one time he loses his Wilson in the mid way of the sea. So, he struggles hard to get him back, he struggles hard to get him back. So, just see the attachment, a small football becomes a person here, the small character which he created for himself becomes an agent of his discussion and that is where places cannot exist without us, but equally important, we cannot exist without places. Look at the deep sentence one has developed it.

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Sack's definition of place as "the countless areas of space that we have bounded or controlled", which "range in scale from a room to a continent" (2001:232), and his comment that "places are the primary means by which we are able to use space and turn it into a humanized landscape" (2001:233) are problematic.



Sack, R. D. (2001) "Place, Power and the Good", in P. C. Adams, S. Hoelscher and K. E. Till (eds) *Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 232-245.

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And then as I said, in the Sack's definition, he talks about how the territorial boundaries; it could be a small room of a weavers house, it could go from a town, it could go for a state, it could go for a country, it could go for even a continent as discussed earlier.

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Casey situates this tension between 'space' and 'place' as part of the debate between modernism and postmodernism. The modernist insists "on the priority of space (whether in the form of a well-ordered physical space or highly structured institutional space) and the postmodernist conversely maintaining the primacy of place and, in particular, lived place" (2001:404).

Place and space are not interchangeable, they are understood here to be different orders of being.

Casey, E. S. (2001) "Body, Self and Landscape: A Geophilosophical Inquiry into the Place-World", in P. C. Adams, S. Hoelscher and K. E. Till (eds) Textures of Place: Exploring Humanist Geographies. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 403-425.

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So, this is how Casey; he talks about there is a tension between a space and place; as a part of debate between modernism and postmodernism. The modernist insists on the priority of space; whether it is in a form of well ordered space, physical space or highly structured institutional space, and the postmodernist conversely maintaining the primacy of place and particular lived place. I will tell you a small example to it. Imagine when Chandigarh was designed by Le Corbusier; all the massive squares which he designed was maybe a following up a modernist approach, but now how Indians started using it?

Just imagine the same Chandigarh have been designed in Riyadh or in Saudi; how it has been used because of the gender practices. So, this can tell you a differentiate of the same thing how it is consumed; the production of the place and the consumption of the place. So, now what Casey talks about is, he debates on the place earlier people think there was a space and people came in and they modified into place.

And it says it is very difficult to say that this is space and this place, this is quite this is or not interchangeable because they are to be different orders of being. Because for instance, a place which you are attached for 20 years will have a different sense. Imagine you left the place for 40 years and you lived in a different place and then you come back.

So, how your attachment keep changing, and how your body and mind are interacting with the place.

So, this is where we are moving between the place and space; they are the two sides of the coin. So, as they are not interchangeable, but if you go; if you look into the previous slides they are the different orders of being. So, and also this is where the time is very relevant, part of which time of this place is; what time this place was, whose place it is, when it was; so this is all the questions which come in mind.

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The slide is titled "PLACE AND IDENTITY". The text on the slide reads: "Place is such a useful concept for Built Environment Studies, as it provides an alternative position that separates the mind from the body, and instead enables a discussion of the relationships between the mind and the external world through the body." The text is underlined in red. Below the text is a hand-drawn red diagram showing a person's head and torso. The head is circled, and an arrow points from the head to the torso. Another arrow points from the torso to a vertical line representing the external world. The diagram illustrates the relationship between the mind, the body, and the external world.

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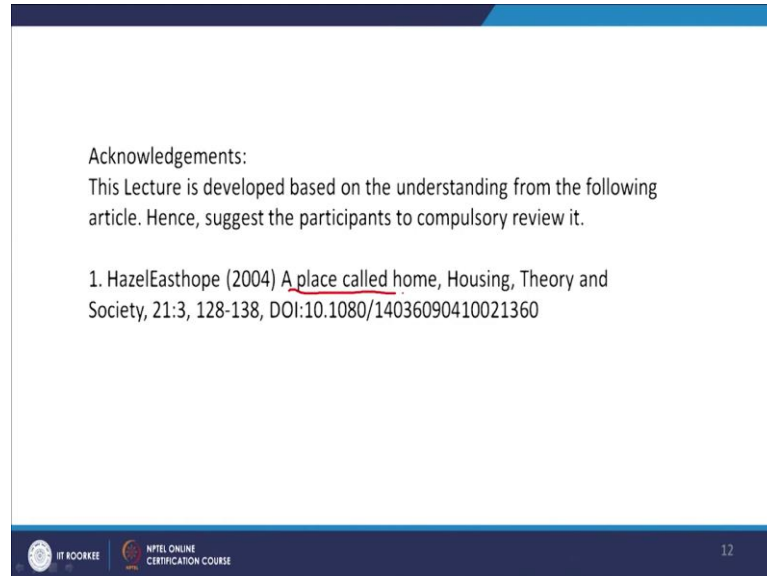
So, the whole discussion will provide a useful concept of the built environment studies, because it provides an alternative position that separates mind from the body. And instead enables a discussion of the relationship between the mind and the external world through the body.

Here, body is the vehicle, but your mind is what you see of the world. So, how you interacts? So, your body is it is taking you to Paris, it is taking to London, it is taking to Egypt, it is taking to Uttarakhand, anywhere; but it is who you are and where you lived, what you did, what was your habitual practices, what was your understanding.

So, it is your mind how it is interacting to the place and this is one of the important part of the discussion, because identity plays an important role in understanding a place. So,

what we do is we develop a kind of understanding on place and identity which we will discuss in the following lecture.

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Acknowledgements:  
This Lecture is developed based on the understanding from the following article. Hence, suggest the participants to compulsory review it.

1. HazelEasthope (2004) A place called home, Housing, Theory and Society, 21:3, 128-138, DOI:10.1080/14036090410021360

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And this lecture is developed on the following article as well as to the link is given here a place called home.

I thank you very much.