

## **CULTURAL STUDIES IN INDIA: A BRIEF REVIEW**

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The culture is the anthropological study of man's way of life. It is an ambiguous term refusing a clear-cut definition. Culture is the unitary development of humans as a distinctive species. It is ethnography in a way. Culture is taken into account to point out the use and nature of and importance of one's language, habits, customs and modes of thought. Culture-studies are done in league with literary studies, history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology and law, among others. It entails the study of gender, race or ethnicity.

Popular culture, sometimes called pop culture (literally: 'the culture of the people') consists of widespread cultural elements in any given society. Such elements are perpetuated through that society's vernacular language or an established lingua franca. It comprises the daily interactions, needs and desires and cultural moments that make up the everyday lives of the mainstream. It can include any number of practices, including those pertaining to cooking, clothing, consumption, mass media and the many facets of entertainment such as sports and literature. Popular culture often contrasts with a more exclusive, even elitist high culture.

The word culture comes from the Latin word 'Kulture.' It is a complicated word in English language. In Roman antiquity culture referred to cultivation of farming like sericulture or fishi-culture. Later it was associated with religious faith. In the 15th century renaissance, culture meant mental cultivation. It meant refinement. So the words cultured and uncultured were used. The term stood for all human beings, and for their progress. The Germans

in the 18th century used the word for enlightenment. The word was used to refer to the development of the individual as a refined person. Culture meant to be moral education, or culture as marking the progress of a people or nation.

In France, the word culture was to compete with another similar word civilization. In fact, both were understood as one and the same sometimes. The Germans took it for Bildung (referring to pedagogical process of the spiritual or moral formation of the individual and by extension to the whole society). But intellectuals differentiated the two words culture and civilization. They said that culture is the way man lived and the civilization is the things man used. The former refers to mental or moral state of refinement and the latter to his material progress. Sir Edward Taylor, the English thinker used the word culture for "complex whole." The German thinker Herder said culture differentiates man from animals. He listed as culture's elements: "the language of a people; the means and objects of subsistence; the instruments and ways of communication and commerce; all forms of art, science, political and legal institutions; the forms of religious service and belief; and a people's diversity of customs and mores in their entirety. Thus culture applied to all people, "enlightened" and "unenlightened," signaling a strong comparative interest entailed by the term to this day" (Herder, 1224)

Culture was thought to be a coherent unit governed by a systematic logic and orderly relationships among many parts. The French philosopher Jean Jack Rousseau discussed culture in his work Social Contract. The Victorian poet-critic Matthew Arnold wrote about culture in his book Culture and Anarchy. He says culture is 'sweetness and light' (Arnold,452). The generic notion of culture holds that all peoples and nations have their own cultures. Culture that way helps man to realize his humanness. Then there are notions of high culture and low culture. The word culture is used as a complex and systematic property by which people can be described.

Culture is something which all people possess uniformly. Modern theories of culture have four factors. One-there are many cultures or sub-cultures. This helps us to understand multiculturalism. Secondly, all cultures are relatively good. Thirdly, all cultures are shaped by complex world historical processes. Fourthly, modern cultures are in interaction and contact with others

cultures.

Class struggle is an old problem in human societies. There are many kinds of class struggles in the name of wealth, position and power. It is differentiation among men. The class struggle has led to several kinds of popular rebellions like the ones in France, Russia and other communist countries. Karl Marx was the first to study class theory. He said the class concept is inherent in the owners of wealth and production. The German sociologist Max Weber said class is operated on the basis of wealth, position and power. He said each of them is independent though interacting. This holds that men in every society are evaluated by their fellow men on a number of different structural bases. Class is understood in terms of job, power to control others, membership, religious and ritual purity, knowledge and education. Class is understood in the form of social stratification. This is gazed for knowing people's style of life. Cultural critics point out that there is some kind of social mobility from one class to another, depending upon people's overall progress. Scholars think that modern societies have greater mobility. Maybe it is just ten percent, but it is quite significant for a society's welfare.

Class struggle magazines *The Difesa* of Florence and *The Grido* of Turin in Europe were the most rigid of cultural exponent of the doctrine of intransigence (i. e. refusal to collaborate with a bourgeois government). In the 19th century Europe Fourier, Owen and Cabet tried to build up a classless society. Compillo Prampolini (1859-1930) in his *La Giustizia* tried to be a reformist socialist. Prampolini has a cheap irony about the interpreters of the proletariat who cannot make themselves understood by the proletarians. Because Prampolini, with all his good sense and rule of thumb, thinks in abstractions. The proletarians are more or less educated, more or less equipped by the class struggle to understand the most refined socialist concepts. The socialist weeklies adapt themselves to the average level of the regional strata. Yet the tone of the articles and the propaganda must always be just above this average level, so that there is stimulus to intellectual progress; so that at least a number of workers can emerge from the generic blur in higher critical perception of history and the world in which they live and struggle.

India cannot improve so easily though its civilization is very old, because

it has its defects inside. One -- its religion is unscientific, unhealthy and not consultative. It is pessimistic. Two-its caste system is its bane, dividing Indians for ever. If there is a perpetual division of the country and its people, where comes strength for it? Caste the blot on Hinduism and the greatest nagator of unity, rationality and the emerging growth and change, is its real destroyer. On the other hand, China has no caste, no class. It is democratic, secular and human. These two – religion and caste--are the mother vices, encouraging Indians-ignorance, overpopulation and corruption. Man is never the measure of things in India and then how can India be human? Westerners say Indian religion is 'inhuman' compared to Christianity. Indian art is symbolical and never utilitarian. Indians view nature as a means of innumerable gods, without knowing that God is one. We never understand the time process as the real process. Indians are known for inefficiency, dishonesty, laziness, unscientific temperament, unsociability and what not? They do not treat all as equal, nor treat their own women with fairness in society.

G. L. Dickinson in his essay "An Essay on the Civilizations of India, China and Japan" with E. M. Forster's foreword, writes, "I will say first that I conceive the dominant note of India to be religion; of China, humanity; and of Japan chivalry." For example, Indians believe that the true life is a spiritual life; that they respect the saint more than any other man; and that they regard the material world as 'unreal,' and all its cares as illusion. Religion is a dominant factor in their life and yet they have not understood it properly. Indian religion is 'inhuman' compared to Christianity. Man is a plaything and slave to natural forces there. Indian religion is pessimistic. Dickinson says the West believes that all effort ought to centre upon the process of living in time; that the process has reality and significance; and that the business of religion is not to deliver us from effort by convincing us of its futility, but to sanctify and justify it. The Vedas, it is true, reflect an attitude to life similar to that of the western Aryans. But the Vedic way of life is lost. At this count, China and Japan are at one with the West. So the real antithesis is not between East and West, but between India and the rest of the world. Dickinson thinks of social institutions. It is said, "India is a home of caste. Caste may be defined as the hereditary determination of man's place in society. No hard and fast line can be drawn between caste and class, for wherever there are classes the position of the father plays some part,

and usually the chief part, in determining the position of the son. Moreover, almost all societies—China is the great exception—have passed through an age of caste; Egypt, of course, par excellence. But in India caste has developed into a rigorous and a multiplicity unknown in any other country. Castes and sub-castes are innumerable, and new ones are always springing up. India has never been democratic, either in theory or in practice; never had the ideal of equal opportunity; always the priest” (Dicknson, 40). Nothing, of course, could be more radically antagonistic to the whole current of theory and practice in the modern West. But his antagonism does not exist at all in the case of China and only in a much modified degree in the case of Japan. Here, too, the position of India is unique. It is the antithetic pole to the West.

Shopping malls are of cathedrals of consumption today. It is true though shop is a glib word; shop is a metaphor of consumption as religion, in which commodities become the icons of worship and the rituals exchange money for goods. And yet the metaphor is both attractive and common precisely because it does convey and construct knowledge of consumerism; it does point to one set of truths however carefully selected as a set. Truths compete in a political arena, and the truths that the consumerism-as –contemporary religion strives to suppress are those that deny the difference between the tenor and vehicle of the metaphor.

The general movement aimed at regulating the products and services of manufactures, sellers and advertisers to serve the interest of buyers is known as consumerism. However, with steady increases in the volume of consumption by households worldwide from about the 1970s, the term consumerism has come to refer to a preoccupation with obtaining various consumer goods or participation in a consumer culture. Related term consumption is used by economists to identify the utilization of economic goods. Consumer bodies are to regulate and control the consumer markets. However, in the pre-industrial society the producer and the consumer were known to each other and they protected each other’s interest. But in the post-industrial societies, the environment is grown global. So there cannot be any contact between the two. So the buyer has to be extra-cautious about the products. He has to be careful of the baits of advertisement. This is known as ‘caveat emptor.’ Of course, there

are some cooperative societies and consumer courts.

Modern areas of consumer concerns are quality and safety, labeling and pricing, selling and credit, advertising and like. There are many continuing problems. Strictly speaking consumption in economics is the end utilization or final use of goods and services. Individual, or private, consumption is direct, as in eating food, wearing clothes, or living in a house. Social consumption is indirect, as when governments or nonprofit groups make expenditures for equipments for weapons, roads and schools. In democracy, social consumption is made, in theory, at least, on the basis of 'one person, one vote,' while individual is made on the basis of 'one dollar, one vote.'

Culture politics is a big thing. As Cornel West assumes it is a culture politics of difference. Culture politics hinges on aspects like racism, sexism and non-culturalism. To escape such simplifications and to begin to provide an ethics for cultural workers, West turns to history. He presents a brief genealogy of the decline of euro-centrism and white suprematism; -- the genealogy being a word refers to Michel Foucault. He argues that the task of demystification can only be carried out by those whose confidence and sense of the contemporary cultural political structures is supported by a knowledge of eurocentrism's history. Here cultural studies and history become indivisible. He says, "In the few years of the 20th century, there is emerging a significant shift in the sensibilities and outlooks of critics and artists. In fact, I would go so far as to claim that a new kind of cultural worker is in the making associated with a new political difference" (West,14).

According to him, the distinctive features of the new cultural politics are to trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; and to reject the abstract, general, and universal in the light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing things. The new politics is associated with the black, feminist, gay, Jew, dalit, tribal, the third world and the like. The new cultural terrain includes newer issues like the issue of color, Jews, woman, gays, lesbians, untouchable and the elderly.

The new cultural politics of difference are neither of adjusting with the mainstream or violating it. They are distinct articulations designed to be with the demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy and individuality. West says this new cultural politics faces three challenges- intellectual, existential and political.

Media also plays an important role in the birth and growth of popular culture. There are mass media and there is culture. Mass media changes from place to place and from time to time, depending upon the advancement of civilization. The ancient people used art and literature as mass media. Later on, new discourses were made. Since the 19th century, mass media like newspapers magazines, journals, radio, TV, video and today the so called electronic items like mobile phones, e-mail, website have modernized and globalized our way of life and style of functioning. It was through these media, we try to live together, communicate and come to know what is happening elsewhere. Arts and science, pleasures and entertainments and wisdom is carried through all these. About Indian culture it is said that, "The British are held responsible, in part at least, for the consolidation of more or less unified Hindu or Muslim religious entities. In the south, the East India Company sponsored a somewhat spurious neo-Brahmanical ruling ideology based on a rigid definition of caste, while British scholars gave far greater importance to doctrinal Islam or the sharia as propagated by the ulema that to the electric religion shot through with local customary practices which was followed by the vast majority of Indian Muslims" (Ayesha,74).

Culture critics think that Indian culture is something unable to understand. It is rather complex and misleading, for the Indian cultures are diverse and they have evolved their own mode of existence. The dialogue between different sub-cultures is specific of socio-political and economical perspectives. However, culture is a means of establishing legitimacy as well as social control. The Indian culture is always in conflict with sub continental states and societies. Spatial location and the affinities of language have been the most important defining features in sub-continental diversities. But within each space and linguistic grouping a complex set of social relations provides the

individual with additional sources of identification. There stand out in particular: those of caste, class and community. Caste and class are overlapping. Caste is more predominant than in India. For example, Brahmins and Thakurs are the upper castes in North India, while Kurmis, Ahirs and Yadavs are the middling castes. In the South, the castes are divided mainly as Brahmins, non-Brahmins, Lingayats, SCs and STs. India is a bastion of Brahmins, Thakurs and a handful of others like Lingayats known as the forward classes. Brahmins are just 5 % but they are 38 % in IAS; SCs and STs are 28 % but they are negligible in IAS till recently. Ayesha Jalal discusses the fact why caste plays a major role in India.

Hence, it can rightly be stated that in the Indian context, Perspectives on culture and identity are based on people's religion, language, region, sophistication, likes, dislikes, media, political, economical and social streams and circumstances. It is also true that in the last certain years or a decade every thread of the culture has been radically changed and it has been established a different kind of impact on the literature and particularly Indian literature and cultural studies.

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