

- History of Idealism is the History of coming to terms with the established order
- CULTURE is that negotiation
- It mediates between Idealism and material conditions of exploitation and profiteering

Desert of the Real

- Here, sameness is essential
- Rather minute differences that ultimately produce sameness
- Fashions that produce a rhetoric of individual choice
- We basically watch the same movie again and again
- Egs. Modern day ones – Ranbir Kapoor's entire career is about watching a grown petulant boy hopefully becoming a man
- Beards, Slim Pants, Coffee, Trekking, photography, Graphic Design – Hipster

- A universally obligatory, eternally better, more valuable world must constantly be affirmed – a world removed from the facticity of daily struggles, yet realizable from **within** each individual without transforming the world
- “Civilization and Culture” – where Sublime Beauty and antagonistic relations of existence are stabilized and pacified

- Culture – Supposed to be concerned with every individual's claim to happiness
- Root of Culture – hierarchies of antagonisms
- Society reproduces itself through economic competition
- Here, happier social existence is rebellion – Maruti factory, Amazon, Bangladeshi Sweatshops, women vs goddesses, Refugees vs migrants

- Culture belongs to he who has internalized a proper mode of behaviour
- He who comprehends the truths of humanity as battle cry is a rebel (Nargis vs Satyajit Ray)
- Culture – ennobles, speaks of the dignity and freedom of man without freeing him

- Beauty and truth, contemplation and intellection then are “cultural” activities
- Both sublimated and internalized
- Neither forms allow real material conditions to change
- Culture perpetuates forms of systemic/epistemic oppression

- At the same time, culture is that which escapes the confines and language of power disrupting the narrative of political and capitalist formation.
- Such escapes are short lived, and quickly co-opted
- “Azaadi Song” – Kanhaiya Kumar, Dub Sharma, *Gully boy*



Pop art/Culture

- Popular art is not art that has attempted and failed to be real art, but art that operates within the confines of the popular
- While retaining much in common with folk art, it became an individual art, existing within a literate commercial culture

Introduction to Human Sciences

Literature Module

Lecture 3: The Written Text

Good or Great Culture

- Some cultural artifacts are more valued than others
- Intrinsic aesthetic/moral/spiritual value
- Shakespeare – great because of something internal? Or have we been conditioned?
- Text is important
- Its values, and their histories, are to be questioned

- English literature departments and the colonial project
- Streamlining of certain literatures as superior to others
- Does *Meghadhoot* reflect the lives of common people? Is the language accessible to anyone but a few? Greek, Latin, Roman texts

The British

- Establish the first of the Literature departments in the country
- European aesthetic and moral values
- The analysis of Western imagination as typified by some of its luminaries: Alighieri Dante, William Butler Yeats, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth

- Were Shakespeare (1564-1616), Dickens (1812-1870), Sharat Chandra (1876-1938) meant to be high literature?
- The case of India – anti-imperial move
- The anti-imperialist hero comes via Europe
- Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Michael Madhusudan Dutta, Vidyasagar, Tagore, Ranade, Dayanand Saraswati

- Community in crisis
- An intellectual class that is educated in the European tradition
- Looking for traditional textual evidences for current malaise
- Resurrecting ancient texts
- Valorizing European ones

- The very concept of Literature comes from this turmoil
- To unify a cultural practice, establish it as good by *European* standards
- Men of letters read, write and discuss proper literature
- Formation of middle class and right “values”

What about the rest

- Literacy, and access to literacy, gains primacy
- Other literatures – written and oral
- Middle Class vs low forms of education (kirtan, kathakathas, jatra, lavani, Parsi and Gujarati theatre)
- Regional literatures – their reach, circulation and afterlives

- Back to a hierarchy
- What experiences get a readership; who are the marginalized
- Between small regional publications and the Jaipur Lit Festival, lies a literary tradition that continues a legacy of colonialism and caste hierarchies

Battling old demons

- Rushdie – *Midnight's Children* (1981)
- Lauded as a continent finding its voice in the West
- Is there one voice? Is the voice of the continent English?
- Major literary traditions in Marathi, Tamil, Bangla, Assam, Mizoram, Kannada, Malayalam

- “World” Lit./ “Third World” Lit
- English writing from the Global South becomes representative of a nation’s literary production and identity
- Binary relationship between first and third world, us/US/Europe vs the world
- The political category of the nation
- Rushdie is the voice of “Islam” or of “India” depending on the book

Does it matter

- Lit. exists in a variegated terrain
- Does it matter, who to, why, under what circumstances?
- Why do states bother with censorship?
- Writers, poets, lyricists, stand-up comedians – arrested, banned, jailed, killed
- Gaddar, Safdar Hashmi, Taslima Nasreen, Sushmita Banerjee, even Gulzar. Manto, Faiz

Literature – Contested site

- *The Satanic Verses* (Salman Rushdie, 1988)
- Banned in India before it was banned in Iran
- Khomeini issues fatwa to kill Rushdie in 1989
- Rushdie goes into hiding in the UK
- Divided Muslims from Westerners along lines of culture
- Freedom of expression vs Blasphemy

- Who read *The Satanic Verses* ?
- English speaking and literate readership
- Very few people in Iran and India would have bothered
- Why then do states continually intervene?
- Why is power afraid of the imaginative text?
- What offends – *Kashmir Files* vs *Parzania*
- *Udta Punjab*

Two thoughts

- A thinking culture is dangerous – organic, mutative, resistant
- A cultural text is bound. All arms of the Humanities are needed to make it organic, relevant

Pride and Prejudice (1813)

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families, that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters.

Ajanta Deo (2019)

कौन अपनी बेटी को चिड़िया कहता है
सिर्फ चिड़िया कहने से घर आसमान नहीं हो
जाता ।