

- 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 ।