



A CRITICAL NOTE ON LANGUAGE AND CULTURE PART 2

Dr. K. Rajesh

Associate Professor of English
Department of Humanities & Science
Guru Nanak Institutions Technical Campus
Hyderabad, India

Abstract

According to Nayar (2008), Cultural studies see the mass culture of a large section of the people, which is popular culture and everyday life. It is art, mass cinema, popular music, comic books, graffiti, radio, fashion, and sports primarily consumed by a large section, of non-elite members of society. These forms of art were disregarded as 'inferior' for a very long time. The word, 'mass culture' was used with its intention to belittle and the culture of elite members was considered as only 'true culture.' The culture of rich minority people is presented as a 'true' culture. Even though a large section of society never reads classical authors, academic studies were focused on 'classical authors' or 'works of art.' Only certain forms, genres and authors were respected as 'culture' especially the elite forms. In other words, the word, 'culture' was associated with a few upper-class elite members, a smaller section of society who legitimised some artefacts as 'culture.'

Keywords: Culture, Popular culture, Mass cinema, Popular music, Fashion, Mass culture

INTRODUCTION

The term 'structure' assumes unity, margins, and a center. Here without margins, there is no center and we cannot find it. This implies that the center is never fixed but it depends on the margins. The center can be found in its *difference* concerning margin. To understand the center, we must refer to the margin. In other words, the meaning of the center is deferred or postponed until we understand the margin.

Therefore, meaning can be known only through *deference* and *difference*. Derrida named it a *difference* to show that features sign and meaning.

Michel Foucault and power/knowledge

Foucault's work was focused on how structures of power depend on structures of knowledge and also on how these power structures create subjects and control them once they have gained knowledge. Foucault was interested in comprehending the processes of classification that supported keeping out certain sections of people from society. He argues that certain people or authorities who have power produce knowledge about those who do not have power; such a knowledge system is known as discourse.

Knowledge and discourse create certain people as 'subjects' and then treat them differently, for example, criminals imprisoned by the law and patients treated by doctors. Therefore, the production of knowledge about less power results in authorities efficiently exercising *practices* of power. There is no neutral knowledge, and always knowledge is used to fulfill the aspirations of the dominant group.

Therefore, from Foucault, we understand that discourses create certain subjects and control them. People who do not have power are called 'subaltern'. Dominant groups in the social system construct subalterns and will also use specific modes such as ideology to keep the subaltern powerless. Ideology helps the dominant groups to remain powerful and at the same time justifies social inequality and oppression and creates a false impression that oppression is natural.

Gayatri Spivak and the Subaltern:

Gayatri Spivak uses methods and viewpoints from Marxism, deconstruction, and feminism. Her work deals with colonized nations and is much relevant to cultural studies. Spivak uses the term 'subaltern' taken from Marxist Antonio Gramsci to describe the

oppressed people. Spivak argues that, in colonialism context, colonial power structures do not allow subaltern to talk or express their views about herself. And it is not even possible for colonized women to speak and colonialism makes her remain silent. Spivak points out subaltern must be represented or spoken for. During colonialism, oppressed native women were represented by the British because they assumed that it was their prerogative and right to speak for them. And such oppression was constructed to justify their presence. The nationalists also spoke for the native women but their interests.

Building on the concept of subaltern, Ranajit Guha headed the work on subaltern studies, which argue that traditional history celebrated the elite and their actions only. Therefore, in traditional history, the Freedom Movement was represented by only a few chosen leaders like Gandhi, Tilak and Nehru, and their actions.

In other words, elitist history disregarded particular kinds of rebellions such as of tribal and farmers against British, to favor elitists such as upper class, caste, and metropolitan movement. Therefore, subaltern studies searched and documented the contributions of smaller revolts to correct the balance.

Few other social formations and how they construct subalterns can be noticed in a capitalist society, patriarchal society, and minorities in a nation. In a capitalist society, working-class laborers to earn profits for the capitalist who holds the power. But capitalism as an ideology propagates and creates the impression that the capitalist system is generous, caring, and kind towards the working class.

Women in a patriarchal society are specified certain roles such as mother, wife, and daughter. In all these roles, women depend upon males. The ideology of gender is to make women believe that they are trained from an early age to aspire for roles like mother and wife. Such ideologies present unequal relationships as natural. Minorities in a nation are supposed to accept the nation as ideal even when their problems are not solved, cultural rights not respected. But any attempt by minorities to the protection of their cultural rights will be treated as a problem that will pose a threat to the nation.

Based on the work of Karl Marx and Fredrich Engles in the 19th century, Marxist Cultural theory was developed. Marxism looks at the capitalist way of creation of wealth made to appear natural and justified through specific systems of thought. The exploitative factory economic relations are taken into the social domain. According to Marx-Engles, fundamental units of the social fight are classes, which are depending upon ownership of means of production. The working class is defined as those who sell labor power and those who purchase labor power as a capitalist class.

The oppressed classes do not realize that they are oppressed and even believe and accept such inequality as natural. The patterns of thought and representation that helps them naturalize oppression and inequality, is defined as Ideology. Such ideologies are reproduced and maintained through cultural artifacts. The Marxist cultural theory sees there is a reciprocal relationship between social, economic conditions, and type of cultural work manufactured. Capitalist creates false beliefs about itself and the working class is under the impression that they are not oppressed and are free. They believe that capitalists have the legal right to the excess and that capital, money, and commodities have their powers and properties.

Conclusion

Antonio Gramsci focuses on the cultural and institutional concept of ideology. Gramsci does not see ideology as an illusion because of material forces like superstitions and popular songs. To show ideology works, he developed the hegemony concept. Hegemony is the connection of ideological and material instruments using which power is exercised and sustained by dominant classes. Hegemony acts in between the ruling class and subjects. The dominant class maintains hegemony through consent and coercion. Dominant class ideas are institutionalized in society through bureaucracy, the courts, and educational systems. And another subtle way of control is to hire highly educated people to normalize the present and the subjects will be made to accept and consent to the things as they are.

Louis Althusser in his concept of ideology, subjects are individuals in society and gives them an identity to work as if they are free agents according to the present state of affairs.

Therefore culture is a reflection of social relations and social conflict that are organized through and by power relations.

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