

Literature and Cultural Studies: A Tool in Criticism

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OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 8

Special Issue: 1

Month: February

Year: 2021

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Impact Factor: 3.025

Citation:

Patil, Sangeeta.

“Literature and Cultural Studies: A Tool in Criticism.” *Shanlax International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, vol. 8, no. S1, 2021, pp. 180–83.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v8iS1-Feb.3950>

Abstract

Cultural Studies is the process by which power relations between and within groups of human beings organize cultural artefact s- such as food habits, music, cinema, sports events and celebrity culture and their meanings. A field of academic study that finds its roots in the Birmingham Centre of Contemporary Cultural Studies (UK) and the work of critics like Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and later by Stuart Hall, Tony Bennet and others, Cultural Studies is a discipline between disciplines. It believes that the ‘Culture’ of a community includes various aspects; economic, spatial, ideological, erotic and political. It is interested in the production and consumption of culture.

Cultural Studies is connected to the rise of popular culture in Western societies in the 1960s, the early tone of Cultural Studies was set by Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, both of whom had working – class backgrounds, they carried their own cultural into their interpretation. The works of Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart with the Birmingham School, it adopted theoretical insights from Poststructuralism and Marxist to develop Cultural Studies. In earlier days it approaches the debate in the direction of textuality, where culture, identity and even nation were seen as texts and narratives.

Industrialization, leisure time, machine work, television viewing, music, painting, pop culture, these brought into the forefront of critical scrutiny. Cultural Studies researchers often focus on how a particular phenomenon relates ideology, nationality, ethnicity, social changes and gender. This emphasis on discourse and textuality remains central to Cultural Studies. Subjects, identities, relationships are constructed out of discourse and deliver meanings only in the act of differentiation.

Stuart Hall’s work has been a trendsetter in Cultural Studies and inaugurated the field in Britain. His essay, “Encoding/ Decoding” set the scene for Cultural Studies of the media, the essay argued that meanings within texts- songs, paintings, television soaps are organized through the operation of certain ‘Codes’. Culture Studies believes that we can’t ‘read’ cultural artefacts only within the aesthetic realm. It looks at popular culture and everyday life approaches

1. Transend the confines of a particular discipline such as literary criticism or history
2. Are politically engaged
3. Rejects the distinction between high/low
4. Analyze the means of production

Antonio Gramsci who modified Classical Marxism is seeing culture as a key instrument of political and social control. In his view, capitalists are not only brute but also penetrate the everyday culture of working people. Thus, key rubric for Gramsci and for Cultural Studies is that of cultural hegemony. Today Cultural Studies is in the most academics across the world. Adopts certain key areas and methods to understand the modes of meaning-production. Those are like language, discourse identity, everyday life, ethnography, media studies, reception/ audience studies and cultural intermediaries. Raymond Williams' definition of culture society "Our description of our experience comes to compose a network of relationships, and all our communication systems, including the arts are literally parts of our social organization---Since our way of seeing literally our way of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of the growth and change"

Cultural Studies is mostly concerned with the modern industrialized economy which are organized on capitalists' lines, it develops a form of cultural materialism concerned with the production. Profit based motivation to the mass culture. Giving materialist status to the person rather than his/her spiritual, moral personality.

EX- super sale / discount rates

Mega sale / year end clearance sale

These are made to cleared out the dead stock in the name of discounts/ offers

Each culture has its own particular meanings, rules and practices which can't be reduced to or explained only in terms of social formation and it is non- reductionism. Its emphasis that class, gender, sexuality, race, nation as well as ethnicity have their own specifics and they can't be reduced.

In metropolitan cities weddings are the symbolic representation of family status and prestige. Pre – Wedding photo shoots, baby shower photo shoots, baby bump clicks, birthday carnivals are now part of celebrity culture. Culture is a social phenomenon. Articulation refers to expressing/ representing as well as 'putting together' with representations of race or nation. In Cultural Studies, articulation is a method used to analyze culture. It envisions a and builds up new frameworks for interpretations. The metaphor of a game of Lego set can be used to be understand how articulation works. It can be fashioned and refashioned.

EX- the retro style of dressing

Having matka(mud cups) chai(tea), matka(mud bowl) palov(rice)

Nati style biriyani

Fashion is not a daily invention. Giving new touch (modern) to the old things becomes trend or fashion. Trend would repeat as time flies. Old skills or things becomes antique piece in the modern world. We can see lots of antique jeweler trend now. Showing our cultural identities through our looks named as ethnic appearance. The life style choices enable the individual to discover and create his/her own identity, no matter what is his/ her background.

Cultural Studies interests in everyday life proceeds from what Raymond Williams called 'lived cultures', where culture is produced through everyday things: the food people eat- food habits like – tea time chats, snacks, junk foods fried items etc. McDonald's -Pizza, burger and sandwich, north Indian style restaurants- kaju panner, dal tadka, kulcha and butter non are most common.

- The fashion adopted by the mass- retro style, western outfits, traditional appearance, formal dressing sense in corporate world, ethnic looks are in trend now

- The entertainment- books and literature in no more whole and sole pleasures of tool, revolutionary touch in technology has changed our world. The theater concept from stage performance (drama) to PVR, multiplex's, web series, HD technologies gives an extraordinary experience to the

audiences. Cultural Studies is also cultural hybridization it is known as “creolization”. It is the impact of Globalization. This is a process where foreign cultural are facts and systems are assigned fresh values within and by the receiving culture. The consumer of an imported foreign style imparts fresh meaning to it, occasionally involving a radical redefinition. World music, a participation in Oscar ceremonies, exotic holidays are examples. Cultural hybridization is a mode of dealing with cultural difference. Globalization closely aligned with digital transformation and rise of the Information Society. This cyberculture of high- power business, increasing corporate control over daily lives, the division of the world into domains by corporations has generated its own counter culture rather than nation – states relationship.

Cultural Studies believe that people leading their everyday lives to produce culture. Culture is the consequence of experience and responses. Today life is hybridized of the global and the local. No pure local culture exists in metropolises anymore’ even local ethnic chic is marketed; it is a part of global consumer market. Example- jowar roti (kadak roti) is exporting to America the migrated people of our regional people are buyers there.

A single street showcases all world leading consumer life style brands (M G Road in Bangalore) London and New York are now multicolored cosmopolis, post-colonial and hybrid. We can hear Folk songs, Veergase, Kamsale, Dollu Kunita (at AKKA Sammelana, in US), celebrating Krishna Janmashtami (ISKON in US). Many Indian songs are part of the American pop music, realizing a Bollywood movie in worldwide theaters. Indian foods are available in most of the other countries like – Idli Vada, masala dosa, tandoori chicken etc. as the same Indian restaurant have multiple cuisines like Chinese foods, Italian foods, Mexico chilies etc. Hybrid arts forms- Indian - western music fusion(despacito versions) Khatak classical dance is fusion with the western hip-hop dance form. Doing Bharatanatyam in skating and foreign saree lovers.

In Cultural Studies media culture reflects the multiple sides of contemporary debates and problems and it is studying an analysis pf popular media culture. Like- films, TV serials, advertisements, it believes that the power of e popular cultural forms can suggest and promote on ideological view far more effectively.

Most contemporary ‘Theory’ - are the full of jargon, incredibly diverse in its source, playful and uses complex methodology. But it has redeeming features. In fact, contemporary Cultural Studies draw most of its analytical rigor from a range of theories which has assimilated and modified for its own purpose. Cultural Studies use form ‘Theory’ are distilled from multiple sources – from deconstruction to postcolonial race studies are common to Cultural Studies worldwide. Structuralism seeks the process of the meaning-production, that is how the text constructs meaning.

Anything that generates meaning through certain forms of representation, it includes all forms of communication- visual, gestural, verbal, aural. Cultural system work in pairs or what structuralists call ‘binary oppositions. thus ‘cat’ and ‘hat’ are pair that defines each other in term of difference. Language works through a system of relations and difference, culture works through a series of relations and oppositions. Ronald Barthes’s work in “Mythologies” has provided exceptionally useful for Cultural Studies. Barthes analyses the rhetoric of fashion writing. Fashion signifier where meaning derives from the object (cap), its supporter (head). The fashion signified is the external context of the fashion object, a context shared by a society

- Woolen equals winter
- Ice creams equals summer
- Rain coats equals rainy seasons
- Fried food items equal winter

A distinguish literary and cultural critic Gayatri Spivak speaks of great relevance to Cultural Studies. she speaks about the term ‘subaltern’ signifies the oppressed class. subaltern can’t speak

for him/ herself because the colonial power prevents the speaking and they were marginalized. Poststructuralism in Cultural Studies proposes difference as intrinsic to identity, the contingency of meaning and the linkage of all knowledge with the exercise of power where the dominant group generates and meaning.

Marxism sees culture as the masking of real social and economic conditions where cultural artefacts conceal exploitative labor and ideology convinces people that everything is alright. Postmodernism in Cultural Studies celebrates the fragmented, the plural, the contingent and the local while rejecting universal and totalities. It sees representation as in itself, calls into question the notion of a Truth behind signs/words/images and collapses the distinction between original and copy.

Feminism in Cultural Studies focuses on the ways in which the woman and her body is represented as a commodity. In Cultural Studies feminist theory examines the gendered use of media and rhetoric to reinforce patriarchy. Feminism seeks empowerment for the woman over the modes of representation advertisements or in medicine, changes in the role of technology, religion, media and law. Cultural Studies is used in Postcolonial theory to look into the global circulation of Euro-American culture which uses products created out of exploited Third World labor, the question of race and gender in economic and cultural policies, the centrality of techniques of representation to the cultural imperialism.

Cultural Studies is extremely active in adult education. It was in the fields or courses like in the visual arts, in music, in town planning, the nature community, settlement areas and in films, in press, in radio courses are acknowledged notably. Cultural Studies looks into how we come to be, kind of people we are; how we are produced as subjects and how we identify with descriptions of ourselves as male or female, black or white etc. identities are made rather than found through representation, especially language in relation to media, an individual may define himself/herself as a heavy metal fan or a fan of rock or jazz music.

So Cultural Studies provide tools to read and interpret one's culture critically. It subverts the distinction between the high and low culture. It allows critical scrutiny of culture without prior prejudices towards one or other sort of culture. It is itself a multiculturalist programme. It has wide realm of social customs and tradition, becomes the part of everyday life.

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