

II. CULTURAL STUDIES IN INDIA

Reasons and a History*

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The essay was written when Cultural Studies in India was attempting to define its place and role in academia. The first part explores the sociopolitical context of cultural studies practice, and the institutional set-up in which it had to find a space for itself. Methodologically it attempts a critique of institutions following the loss of prestige of the English department with the decline of the colonial aura and the opening up of higher education to hitherto excluded sections of the population. The essay then proceeds to a historical survey of the concept of culture as it emerged, got translated and deployed—an exercise in discourse analysis to draw forth the influential uses of the term in the Indian context, the changes it has undergone with time, and its appropriation across several disciplines and fields of inquiry. Re-examining past usage is an important step towards self-knowledge that any discipline must acquire and constantly renew to remain relevant to its social context.



Two Events

Two historical events provide the framework for the emergence of new political subjectivities in India. Together, these two events cleared the ground for the constitution of a modern nation state. But the meanings and forces that they represent in their separate occurrence have not harmonised enough to render the formation of the Indian polity as a done deal. Rather

**Editorial Note:* The essay is being published for the first time in this anthology. Through posing the question of what 'our time' is constituted by, Prasad pries loose the grip that the colonial era has on our consciousness as the sole site of elaboration of our modernity: '... when the edifices built on the assumption of and desire for self-identity are being dismantled all around us.' He renders our relationship with history a concern in the present. He then proceeds to map the grid of cultural studies as a field in the Indian context.

than a thoroughly and irreversibly reconstituted social space, we continue to live with struggles over the state form and, what is more relevant to our immediate purpose, a void in the place that is conventionally assigned to such formations to a national-culture. A distinctive property of cultural studies has been its grounding in national-cultural spaces, its constitutive relation to the changing demographics of intellectual culture. Hence the importance of dealing with the basic question of the nature of the national culture (or in this instance the difficulties attending its description) before we can discuss what kind of cultural studies might conceivably be practised in it.

The two events in question are: the achievement of independence from British rule in 1947, and the adoption of a republican Constitution in 1950, which regardless of what one might think of its actual success, is the inaugural moment of the Indian Revolution. In the national imaginary, however, 1947 or Independence has always occupied the place of honour while 1950 or Revolution has remained in the background until recently, celebrated with a display of military power in Delhi but otherwise symbolically inert. Or late the revival of interest in the legacy of B. R. Ambedkar among other factors has made some difference to this state of affairs but by no means amounts to a thorough reorganisation of the symbolic.

This scenario of symbolic irresolution has had its reflection in the way the horizon of cultural practices and cultural studies has been dominated by a sort of inter-civilisational agonistics [i.e., disputes or conflict], the confinement of all questions of cultural significance to a rigid East-West axis and a consequent neglect of the cultural existence of the nation state's interior. The question of the present, the here and now, of what constitutes 'our time' (Dhareshwar 1995) and place, has tended to the deferred to an indefinite future while the 'postcolonial' questions and all the labour of postcolonial critique are put at the service of the spiritual rehabilitation of the departed colonial master.

It is perhaps no accident that this question of what constitutes our time is only beginning to be rigorously posed now, at a time when the edifices built on the assumption of and desire for self-identity are being dismantled all around us. For an Indian programme of cultural studies worthy of its name, a thorough reconsideration of the question of our contemporaneity is a necessary first step. This is where the differential significance of the two important dates of modern history begins to emerge. For the humanities, a disengagement from the trauma of separation and abandonment that the signifier 1947 can be said to represent has been difficult. Even the repudiation of the colonial past, in its insistent repetition, has proved to be

way of returning to dwell in that very past. It is as if the very programme of passive revolution to which other sectors and disciplines were dedicated had imposed upon the humanities the need to disavow that project. The problem that surfaces here can be described as our inability to historicise the ancient regime, to inhabit the synchronic space inaugurated by the declaration of Revolution in such a way as to render historical, to return to its proper place (without minimising its role in determining our present condition), the colonial era which otherwise dominates our consciousness largely as the site of elaboration of our modernity.

Our Time

It is an extraordinary notion that the colonial era, structured as a despotism, predicated on archaic and obscurantist ideologies of authority and power (the 'rule of colonial difference' as Partha Chatterjee has termed it), should continue to appear to us as the era of our modernity. The difference at issue here perhaps amounts to no more than a shift of perspective that would result from the adoption of a fiction of self-instituted modernity. As long as it seems that we were forcibly separated from our past by an alien intervening force, fantasies of a reunion continue to sustain us. If, on the other hand, we take seriously the fiction implied in the inauguration of the Republic, that is to say the fiction of a radical rupture that places a distance between us and all pasts, we find ourselves with the task of thinking of the present in all its complexity, without wishing away the colonial era as a determining factor.

Cultural studies, as it has emerged in academia today, is unthinkable without such a shift of perspective to the imperatives of the contemporary, which is not to say that history is irrelevant to it. One, somewhat simplistic, way of defining cultural studies would be to say that it is the study of all aspects of a specifically capitalist culture, as opposed to non-/pre-capitalist culture or 'traditional' forms of culture. This formulation is, however, only partially true, since it reduces the object of cultural studies to some specific type of content, and encourages a sort of area-wise division, based on the presupposition that there are separable zones of culture. It is well known that culture was not invented by cultural studies, and that before its advent there was already a discipline of formidable strength, anthropology, which took culture as a primary object. It thus becomes imperative to state what makes the object of cultural studies different from the one proposed by anthropology as well as the one assumed by literary criticism to be its particular burden. However, it is insufficient to answer by invoking the

emergence of a different and separate zone of culture that falls outside the purview of anthropology.

An improved definition would be that cultural studies emerges when 'culture' in the sense in which it is conceived traditionally, whether by the discipline of anthropology or in the realm of common sense, is no longer recoverable in a pure state. In the Indian context, two spheres of 'culture' were conventionally recognised, the key factor of identification being their non-modern character. The first of these is what is called 'tradition', including the Sanskritic textual tradition and contemporary practices thought to be deriving from them. The other could be placed under the rubric of 'oral tradition' and includes folk, tribal and other practices that fall outside the purview of both the modern and the Sanskritic traditions. This two-fold division of culture roughly coincided with the division of labour between the two great, related disciplines of Indology and anthropology.

The self-critique undertaken by anthropology in recent decades brought into crisis some of its basic assumptions such as the distance, especially temporal, that was assumed to separate the world of the ethnographer from his/her object of study. While the ethnographic method continues to be employed in cultural studies, it can no longer be un-problematically supported by the 'allochronic' relation. Besides, the political dimension of cultural practice also came into view and it became retrospectively clear that the evacuation of politics from the objects of ethnographic study facilitated by the political subjugation of the world by European imperialism could not be sustained in the context of new political formations that emerged from the struggles against European domination.

For all that, the rise of cultural studies cannot be explained by the crisis in anthropology alone. For that to happen, the culture that disappeared from the sites of anthropological research had to reappear in locations that were never suspected to have a cultural dimension. This is where the history of the emergence of cultural studies in Britain acquires its significance.

Anthropology and Sociology

Stuart Hall has written a historical account (1990) of the emergence of Cultural Studies as a discipline at Birmingham. The founding texts of the discipline identified there are Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution*, and E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*. Hall's account lays much emphasis on the break with older definitions of culture in

the humanities (Leavisian, based on notions of literary excellence); the confrontation with an Americanised, 'scientific' sociology and later, the appropriation of sociology from within' (23); the move from a literary-humanist to an anthropological definition of culture, the stress on the contemporary, on the 'lived culture' of the working classes; and the importance of the theoretical dimension to defining cultural studies as opposed to a definition based on the objects of study. Gramscian notions such as hegemony, the national-popular, and the specificity of the political context, combined with the Althusserian theory of ideology, provide the emergent discipline with its theoretical base. Historically, the rise of the discipline is made possible by a break located in the 1960s but traced back to events in the previous decade, that is, in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

Hall rightly treats the particularities of the British historical situation in which the discipline emerged as a contingent conjuncture which need not repeat itself in every place where it is practised. Thus when Hall emphasises cultural studies' adoption of an anthropological rather than humanities-inspired definition of culture, he is also pointing to the important role ethnography would play in the new discipline. But in the Indian context where unlike in Britain the anthropological definition has shared the space with other definitions and has indeed been responsible for notions of an unchanging cultural substance, a stress on the contemporary, on the political dimension of cultural practices and so on, requires a break with the 'eternalising' habits of anthropology. In the context Hall is describing, the existence of the contemporary was not an issue, only its worthiness to be called culture. In our context, efforts to theorise the contemporary face a formidable opposition from entrenched eternalists and essentialists.

However, there is another dimension of Hall's account which, though not explicitly taken up by him, is of relevance to us as we try to think of the future of this discipline in India. We can track this by beginning with Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, acknowledged as one of the founding texts of the discipline, and his inaugural lecture, 'Schools of English and Contemporary Society.' In the lecture, as described by Hall, Hoggart conceived Cultural Studies as being concerned with 'neglected materials' drawn from popular culture and the mass media' (Hall 1990, 21). He visualised the aim of such study as the identification of 'qualitative cultural evidence' in these materials by using literary-critical methods. As Hall puts it, its conservatism 'may have reflected that historical compromise required to get these illicit questions posed at all' (ibid.). However, that did

not prevent hostile reactions to this venture from sociology which then Britain was in the grip of American inspired scientism and laid claim to the field that cultural studies was encroaching on, insisting on the pre-eminence of its own 'scientific' methods and quality control. While sociology was worried about encroachment, there was objection to the elevation of the contemporary (which was regarded as by definition debased) to the status of culture from the literary-critical side.

The worries of sociology were not entirely unfounded because there was a crucial way in which cultural studies was all about encroaching on its ground, of 'appropriating it from within.' The title of Hoggart's book *The Uses of Literacy*, already suggests the emergence of a set of concerns that are situated in a world that a certain sociology takes for its object, the world of the working classes, the world of 'social problems,' of norm and deviation, of functionality and dysfunction. Literacy is a typical 'social problem' of the masses.

Scholarship Boys and Girls

In *The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart developed the profile of a social type that he called the 'scholarship boy.' This type was to be found at the very site of intense sociological research, the working class neighbourhood, the working class boy or girl drawn into the programme of new literacy who did well in school and was able to enter university, presumably one of the new universities that had opened up to expand the higher education base beyond the traditional Oxford-Cambridge circuit. Under such circumstances it is more than likely that these boys and girls had an experience similar to the one that some Indians have reported on entering the academy. Just as the Indians, to their horror, encountered their own objectified image in the annals of anthropology, as is vividly and dramatically narrated in the famous story of A. K. Ramanujan, 'Annayya's Anthropology,' it would seem that a similar uncanny experience awaited the working class students when they stumbled upon sociological studies in which they were treated as social problems. The texts of British cultural studies confirm this when they insist that working class life is not devoid of its own distinctive cultural ethos, that this cultural life is moreover not just a remnant, a survival of older 'genuine' cultures, but a culture produced in and through the experience of the contemporary, within the framework of a hegemonic capitalist culture but not entirely under its tutelage.

It would seem then that this is a culture whose concept can be said to have been produced by the scholarship boys and girls who had acquired the academic legitimacy to be able to propose a new object of study. Turning back to the question of our own approach to cultural studies, it is clear that this discipline claims our attention in the same way that other intellectual trends in the past have done, by way of a route established in the wake of colonialism, which brings us all the latest developments and forces us to reckon with them. In other words, we will look in vain here for the duplication of the conditions that paved the way for cultural studies in Britain in the sixties. Thus while there are millions of scholarship boys and girls in our modern nation, they are as yet only a class in itself, and not a class for itself that would be in a position to assert the validity of its field of experience as an object of inquiry. Our intellectual subjectivities are still formed by the retrospective trauma of the anthropological encounter, which locates the adversary far away, in the fabled West, rather than in sociological objectification, which brings to the fore the reality of class struggle in our midst.

What I am suggesting is that unlike the British situation where it was a question of discovering and recognising the cultural significance of working class lives, here in India we are more concerned with the cultural migration of increasing numbers of Indians from pre-modern enclaves into modern urban spaces. The resulting formation remains symbolically unrecovered, and humanities education continues to ignore it. One of the tasks of cultural studies in such a context is to devise a curriculum that is more responsive to this emerging situation. Institutionally, the English department has been until recently the locus of the education of the spirit. The loss of legitimacy suffered by this institution is the context for the reconsideration of humanistic education that has become the burden of cultural studies in India. Entire sections of the Indian population which had hitherto been outside the pale of the education system are today finding their way into it against severe odds. On the other hand, in the absence of the colonial master's riveting presence, the learning of English in India is becoming more and more Asianised. By this I mean that for the new learners of English, the gap between their own existential realities and the language that holds the promise of happiness is as wide and permanent as it has always been for the people of the East Asian countries, thus standing out in sharp contrast to the more-English-than-thou perfection that colonial love once enabled.

Cultural studies inherits the task of education of the spirit from the English department under conditions of deep disarray: absence of an

effective common language, competition between Indian-national and regional-national claims to subjective affiliation, the state's refusal to recognise the crisis of the national spirit, the elimination by relentless capitalist pressure of the political middle that mediated modern subjectivity and was distinct from both the familial-affective and the economic dimensions of human existence, and so on. It is an unenviable position and it is not yet clear that cultural studies is capable of meeting so huge a challenge. Efforts are on, however, and enthusiasm is at its pitch. Among other things the task involves the symbolisation, through the labour of description, interpretation and critique, of the cultural substance of the hitherto neglected and ignored or exoticised lives of the vast majority. In what follows, I present my own effort at a broad survey of the use of the term 'culture' in Indian intellectual discourse from colonial times to the present, focusing on the changing meanings of the term, the contribution of various disciplines to research in culture, and recent developments in cultural studies proper.

Meanings of Culture

It is in the colonial era that for the first time Western Indologists and Indian nationalists together undertook the elaboration of the idea of an Indian culture. The Indologists' construction of an Indian tradition, based largely on textual sources, and initially addressed to Europe's own anxieties about its place in the world, was picked up by the nationalists, who divided the cultural realm into 'two domains—the material and the spiritual,' conceding the West's superiority in the former, while claiming sovereignty over the 'spiritual' domain, which bore the "essential" marks of cultural identity' (Chatterjee 1993). This realm was to be out of bounds for colonial reformers, but at the same time, as Chatterjee has argued, the nationalists had their own project 'to fashion a "modern" national culture that is nevertheless not Western.'

At this stage, however, terms like tradition and civilisation were more prevalent, and the meaning of culture was not fixed. In 1910, during the era of *swadeshi* (movement for the promotion of native industry), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, [1877–1947, born in Colombo of Anglo-Ceylonese parents, his father being a Ceylonese Tamil] a cultural nationalist and art historian who included even present-day Sri Lanka in his map of Indian culture, describes culture as a 'capacity for immediate and instinctive discrimination between good and bad workmanship' and a 'view of life

essentially balanced.' Here culture is understood as a historically developed human attribute, an assimilated refinement of taste that goes with a certain settled, rooted way of life ('restlessness is essentially uncultured'), recalling the ideas of William Morris (Coomaraswamy 1994). It is this meaning that seems to have prevailed when the nationalists translated culture as *skriti*, a word now used in many of the major Indian languages, while Rabindranath Tagore's suggestion of *krishti*, which is closer to the English word in its derivation from *krishi* or cultivation, never gained acceptance even in his native Bengal, in spite of his being the most influential cultural figure of his time. No attempt to distinguish culture from civilisation is as yet discernible here.

In its substantive definition the national culture included the classical heritage in the arts, traditions of education (the *guru-sishya parampara*), family structure (the joint family was celebrated as quintessentially Indian), and the deep-rooted customs and practices of village India. The twentieth century witnessed a widespread campaign for the reform, rediscovery and revival of the classical arts. Inspired by the Western idea of the 'classical' in the arts, it sometimes required quite a bit of artifice to fit an Indian variant to the classical label, as in the case of the musical traditions of Hindustani and Karnatak whose reception contexts were unlike anything associated with Western classical music. A temple dance traditionally performed by a low-caste class of 'devadasis' was taken and 'purified' to create 'Bharatanatyam,' one of the currently widely practised national dance forms. The textual tradition was re-visited in the light of Orientalist scholarship and selectively annexed to the national cause, with the *Bhagavadgita* emerging as a sort of national text, embodying the spiritual distinction of Indian civilisation. The search for a 'living tradition' which would supplement the classical heritage led to the celebration and appropriation of folk arts and village crafts (Guha-Thakurta 1992). Early nationalist constructions of India's cultural heritage tended to focus exclusively on Hindu achievements, ignoring the Islamic heritage, on the basis of an ideological negation by which Muslim rule was seen as having caused the decline of Hindu civilisation.

Intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore and the progressives in the national movement on the other hand tried to construct a more inclusive cultural history, locating themselves in the modern present and acknowledging the irreversible remaking of Indian culture and society by colonial intervention. Jawaharlal Nehru, who became India's first prime minister, was a key figure in this project but it was a sociologist, D. P. Mukherjee, who produced the first extended reflection on the idea of a 'modern Indian culture.' In the forties, when Mukherjee wrote his book,

the cultural climate seems not to have been very hospitable to such an idea given the widespread preoccupation with the revival and preservation of the disappearing cultural heritage of the nation. Mukherjee's project in the book is to reflect on the contemporary cultural situation in the soon to be-independent nation, to inventory the cultural, social and intellectual heritage and its effectiveness in the present, as well as to produce a concept of the present moment as constituted by a diversity of forces, traditions and processes. Uncharacteristically for his time, Mukherjee, a partisan of a socialist future for India, distances himself from any approach to culture that privileges nationalism, and insists on a sociological account of culture as 'the whole social process'. Rejecting the idea of culture as heritage, he locates modern culture in a society marked by 'the artifice of an unreal class-structure'. He rejects the idea of India as a land prone to the mystic and the spiritual, and is, throughout, preoccupied with the most pressing issue of the time: that of the co-existence of Hindus and Muslims, and other minorities, within a modern nation state.

Tradition and Modernity

The 1940s and 1950s are a crucial period for the emergence of culture as an object of study. In this period we see the triumph of social anthropology over sociology as the disciplinary home of culture studies and in consequence, the decline of the idea of a modern Indian culture as defined by contemporary struggles between social forces, whether traditional, entrenched, emergent or imposed. The overwhelming sense of the contemporary, which favoured a strictly sociological approach, was soon replaced by a more historicist approach, as the dualism of Tradition and Modernity, by far the most influential paradigm in South Asian cultural studies, took hold.

Two key figures in this shift were M. N. Srinivas and Milton Singer, an associate of Robert Redfield [1897-1958, US anthropologist and ethnolinguist]. In 1952, Srinivas published *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India*, a work which, Singer asserts, demonstrated how the social anthropological method could be applied to a Great Tradition. It was Redfield who proposed, in his project for the study of civilisations at Chicago (Srinivas had been in California), the fundamental distinction between Great and Little Traditions, roughly equivalent to 'higher' and 'lower' orders of cultural practice, the former more reflective, more systematic, and textually elaborated, while the latter is considered to be

more spontaneous, fragmented, primitive. Until then the anthropological method had only been employed in the study of the so-called primitive societies, but Redfield was proposing a research project of global sweep to study the cultural heritage of humanity. Singer undertook the Indian portion of the study, concentrating on the south Indian city of Madras (since renamed Chennai), later published under the title *When a Great Tradition Modernizes: An Anthropological Approach to Indian Civilization*, with a foreword by Srinivas. Singer argued that the Indian Great Tradition (the use of the singular was to attract criticism) 'was culturally continuous with the Little Traditions to be found in the diverse regions, villages, castes and tribes' and that therefore, 'even the acceptance of "modernizing" and "progress" ideologies does not result in linear forms of social and cultural change but may result in the "traditionalizing" of apparently "modern" innovations' (Singer 1972). The most significant element in this formulation is the suggestion that a civilisation with a tradition evolved over the *longue duree* acquired the strength to assimilate ideas and changes coming from outside, and to convert them into organic elements of its own make-up.

One of the most influential and controversial concepts in this new disciplinary thrust was Srinivas's 'Sanskritisation' which, together with 'Westernisation' served to explain social change in modern India. Sanskritisation, a process by which the lower orders of traditional caste society aspire for a higher social status by adopting the customs and manners of the upper castes, was seen as one of the ways in which the continuity of Little and Great Traditions was maintained. Singer's concept of 'cultural performance' illustrates both the notion of cultural continuity between Great and Little traditions and that of the absorption of modern influences. Singer defines a cultural performance in the broadest possible manner, including within its ambit plays, concerts, and lectures, and the cinema and radio, as well as 'prayers, ritual readings and recitations, rites and ceremonies, festivals, and all those things we usually classify under religion and ritual rather than with the cultural and artistic' (ibid.). In other words, the anthropologist's, the Indologist's and the aestheticist's definitions of culture have here been fused into one, to constitute a seamless continuum of culture, object of the new social anthropology. The disruptions and displacements brought about by colonial modernity, which were foregrounded in Mukherjee's sociology of the present, are now located as challenges which the Great Tradition takes in its stride. A. K. Ramanujan, a pioneer of Indian folklore studies, also [like Redfield] based in Chicago, rejected the Great and Little Tradition dichotomy and asserted that 'cultural

traditions in India are indissolubly plural' and organised according to the principles of context-sensitivity and reflexivity (Ramanujan 1999).

Culture and Development

Around the sixties, the dualism of 'culture and development/ modernisation' begins to vie for space with its elder cousin Tradition/Modernity. Culture and development acquired wide currency at a more grass-roots level, as development projects, undertaken by the nation state and international agencies, began to transform the territory. While the Tradition/Modernity paradigm was prevalent among Indologists, anthropologists and the nationalist intelligentsia, 'culture and development' rallies a wide range of social science disciplines including economics, political science, sociology, and gender studies, as well as environmentalists and other grass-roots activists and NGOs. Culture and development is the decolonising, modernising nation state's version of tradition/modernity. Culture in this framework can be a hindrance to development, as in Amartya Sen's famous formulation about the 'missing women,' who are the victims of cultural constraints on women's access to food. Superstitions and prejudices nourished by entrenched cultural practices can come in the way of educating illiterate people in family planning, health, education, hygiene and other developmental concerns. Culture can also be a resource: traditional cultural forms can be usefully employed to spread developmental messages. Ecological debates have thrown up notions such as 'masculinist forestry' and turned to women as good agents in preserving the environment (Dietrich in Menon 1999). Thirdly, there is also the question of 'cultural survival,' cultural rights of minorities, tribes and other groups, which come under threat from development's blind onward march and the imposition from above of Western models of linear progress and development.

The most sustained critique of development and modernisation from a point of view that affirmed the validity and continuity of Indian traditions was undertaken by Ashis Nandy. Recouping a Gandhian 'critical traditionalism,' Nandy attacked the deracinating effects of Western rationality, individualism, and other ideologies adopted by the Nehruvian state and the middle class intelligentsia in its developmental campaign. Against the Western tendency to emphasise rupture as the precondition of change, Nandy, following Gandhi, emphasises continuity. Against the rigid separation between male and female, individual and individual, Nandy avers that fluid identities and ambiguous selves are

more characteristically Indian. The imperative of cultural difference and plurality, of multiple rationalities, also gives rise to a critique of Western science and its hegemonic universalism, in the works of Nandy, Shiv Vaidyanathan and others. The assertion of cultural specificity occurs in other fields of knowledge as well. Thus Sudhir Kakar, a psychoanalyst, has argued for a culture-sensitive psychoanalytic practice and has elaborated his own analytic picture of the Hindu psyche. There is a substantial body of psychoanalytic readings of South Asian culture, including the works of Girindrashekar Bose, the first Indian analyst, Philip Spratt, Erik Erikson, Gananath Obeyesekere, and Nandy (see Vaidyanathan and Kripal 1999). There is sometimes a tendency towards culturalist reduction in these writings, producing a domesticated psychoanalysis from which the fundamental alienation that psychoanalysis posits at the threshold of human subjectivity is wished away. More recently, Lacanian psychoanalysis has found favour among film studies scholars.

Nandy's rise to eminence as an ideologue of decolonisation roughly coincides with the emergence of 'postcolonial studies,' galvanised by the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978. In India, Saidian postcolonial studies as well as studies of development undertaken in the social sciences were influenced by Nandy's discourse. Postcolonial theorists like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha also shared this space of the critique of colonial reason. Apart from this, another important development was the emergence of *Subaltern Studies*, a work with a series of volumes to which historians, anthropologists and in later volumes humanities scholars contributed, in which colonial and nationalist historiography was critiqued and a 'subaltern history,' of ordinary people, of tribal and lower caste groups, during colonial rule and after, was undertaken. Culture plays a very important role in this project, especially when there is an emphasis on the spontaneity of 'peasant insurgency' and tribal uprising, and the question of the subaltern mentality. Postcolonial studies, the *Subaltern Studies* project, and the critique of development and modernisation by Nandy and others, together constitute the legacy of cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s.

Globalisation and Local Cultures

In the 1990s, the terms shift again, as globalisation arrives on the scene. In 'Globalisation and local cultures' we have the third and most recent version of the Tradition/Modernity paradigm, where again the emphasis is on

questions of cultural survival in the face of globalisation, the resilience of local cultures and their ability to 'consume modernity' on their own terms. Arjun Appadurai has offered a comprehensive theory of globalisation and the emergence of what he terms 'public culture.' Appadurai treats culture as 'the dimension of difference,' of identity based on differences emerging after the rupture of globalisation, in a world where he considers nation states to be on their last legs. Global relations and movements, or 'flows,' have a more decisive bearing on human lives today than national identification. Others are less sanguine about the effects of globalisation and more sceptical about the nation state's imminent demise. Appadurai is confident about the ability of societies to assimilate modernity, which is what globalisation transports: although we have travelled far, we are still within Singer's paradigm where traditional societies respond to and assimilate modernity in their own ways.

The three variants of a paradigm that have been examined so far all share one thing in common: they approach the question of Indian culture on an international plane. In each case, one term in the opposition refers to a force, a process—modernity, development/modernisation, globalisation—which is of extraneous provenance, while the other term indicates the culture which is at the receiving end. None of them was developed with specific reference to India, which is only one of the sites to which they are applied. The concept of culture employed in all three variants is also predominantly anthropologically defined.

National Culture

Within India, other paradigms of cultural analysis have devoted themselves to reading and analysing the stuff of national culture. Some of these emphasise a distinctive native culture with its own rationality, its sense of self and strategies of survival. There are also attempts to forge an indigenous conceptual series for the study of Indian culture, to reconnect with indigenous intellectual traditions after the 'amnesia' of colonialism. Beginning in the mid-1980s and throughout the 1990s, as questions of globalisation assumed importance, the domestic politics of communalism, which resulted in popular mobilisation and widespread violence against minorities, led to a fresh attempt to re-examine the past. As the Hindu nationalists put forth versions of history that supported their political activities, liberal and left intellectuals, particularly historians, revisited the past to reassert the plurality and ineluctable syncretism and hybridity of

India's cultural heritage (Thapar 2000). The question of multiculturalism, and of cultural rights, also became more urgent as cultural and ethnic conflict was seen as threatening the secular-democratic fabric of the nation state.

Social anthropologists have noted the difficulty in the Indian instance, of separating a sphere of culture from that of religion, community, caste, etc. Caste has been a central category for understanding Indian society, from Dumont's notion of *homo hierarchicus* [1966] to more recent studies of caste conflict in a contemporary setting, where caste has more to do with cultural and political identity than with social position. This shift to caste as identity brings it into the realm of culture, and various studies have asserted, against the idea of a universal dynamic of Sanskritisation, that caste groups enjoy a measure of cultural autonomy and strive to maintain their cultural identity through the formation of networks across regional and language barriers. The struggles of the Dalits (literally, 'the oppressed,' a term now used for the lowest castes in the caste hierarchy, especially the untouchables) for social justice have included literary movements and other forms of cultural expression, as well as attempts, under the broad rubric of folklore studies, to record and study the traditional cultural forms prevalent among these groups.

Feminist scholarship has engaged with questions of culture at many levels (Menon 1999; Thapan 1997). For nationalists, woman was the guarantor of cultural identity and continuity. In the confrontations between the nationalists and the colonial government, and after Independence, in the confrontations that arose between religious groups and the nation state, women became the object of reformist attention and patriarchal protectionism. Two recent debates arising out of events in the 1980s that have had a lasting impact on the character of the national polity have posed a challenge to feminist scholarship, raising questions of the competing claims of women's and minority cultural rights and the law, and of female agency in traditional practices that are offensive to a modern, secular outlook. These relate to an incident of sati (self-immolation by a widow on her husband's funeral pyre, a practice that was thought to have died out) in a village of Rajasthan, and the case of Shah Bano, a divorced Muslim woman who filed a suit for maintenance from her former husband, leading to a debate about the competing claims of the state and the community's own institutions to handle such disputes. Using these incidents from the 1980s and the legislative moves that followed each, the anthropologist Veena Das has investigated how 'a web of creative or destructive tensions in the matter of cultural rights' determines relations between communities, the state, and the individual (Menon 1999). Feminist scholarship has shown

how communities deploy culture as a means to assert the supremacy of community rights over women's rights as citizens in a democratic polity. At the same time, on the Uniform Civil Code issue, which has been intensely debated in recent years, feminists have become more sensitive to community laws which, in certain instances, may be more beneficial to women, in opposition to the Hindu nationalist deployment of the discourse of citizenship to press for a civil code that will prevail over all other community specific laws (ibid.).

The realm of Indian politics is also continuous with that of contemporary popular culture, in particular the culture of popular cinema. South Indian cinema culture has been the breeding ground of some of the most powerful political leaders to have emerged in the states of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Sociologists have studied the ways in which the unique film cultures of these regions have functioned as a platform for electoral politics. The fan clubs of popular film stars are today an important feature of everyday political and social life, in some cases emerging as militant front runners in campaigns for a linguistic national identity.

Meanwhile, the impact of the Birmingham school of cultural studies and a reconstructed anthropology's search for new objects of research have spurred cultural studies projects in India, notably studies of communities of reception for the popular film, popular cultures of photography, music, etc. Film has come to be seen as the emblematic cultural institution of modern India, and in recent years film studies has acquired legitimacy as a discipline with a multidisciplinary resource base. The importance of globalisation notwithstanding, there is a distinct national sphere of cultural studies, which draws upon many of the ideas and paradigms mentioned above, but locates its concerns within the national space. One instance is the studies of aesthetic modernism. Post-colonial or 'third-world' societies are conventionally reserved for development and modernisation approaches in the academy, where cultural issues are subsumed under sociological, economic and political questions. Studies of modernism, on the other hand, are concerned with the emergence of artistic practices and ideologies which participate in the international modernist movement while speaking from within (though not only about) their own national space. Modern literature, cinema, theatre, architecture, painting and other fine arts have been the object of this critical appreciation (Kapur 2000), with the *Journal of Arts and Ideas* serving as an important forum for the theorisation of an Indian modernism.

In the contemporary field of cultural studies, traditional disciplines like anthropology are joined by new discourses like postcolonial

studies, feminism, psychoanalysis, semiotics, post-structuralism and postmodernism (see Niranjana et al. 1993; Spivak 1988). Ethnographies of cultural communities, including traditional ones as well as newer consumerist types of community, feminist critiques of gendered cultural forms and expressions, and of patriarchal ideologies, film and television studies, and studies of other modern, technology-dependent cultural forms, caste politics, popular religion, histories of modern and popular political cultures—these are some of the types of cultural study being currently undertaken in India at present, by scholars belonging to a range of social science and humanities disciplines (see Manuel 1993; Niranjana et al. 1993; Thapan 1997; Vasudevan 2000). The concept of culture has undergone a definite shift of emphasis from ancient heritage and primitive ways of life to the more unstable and complex practices and processes of contemporary existence. The past coexists with the present, as it does in any social formation, but not in a historicist time-space. Cultural studies increasingly regards the present moment as a synchronic dimension, where all constituent elements, whether ancient or recent, foreign or indigenous, constitute a symbolic network with its own unique properties, making it radically contemporary. Forging the tools for analysing this complex cultural space is the task of the future.

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