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The Aesthetics of popular culture and the cultural negotiation in the contemporary times in Indian Perspective

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Abstract

The word 'culture' is derived from the French word "colere" which comes from Latin "cultus" meaning to 'nurture'. Culture refers to the nurturing values, norms and beliefs that a society upholds. Cultural Studies is the study of the ways in which culture is constructed, learned, transmitted and transformed over time. Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary approach which borrows concepts from diverse disciplines like sociology, anthropology, history, political science, and literature to study culture, particularly its broadly conceived and complex array of signifying practices. The beginning of Cultural Studies can be traced back to 1930s Frankfurt School which inaugurated critical studies of mass communication and culture, thus producing an early model of cultural studies.

'Cultural Studies' interest in everyday life proceeds from what Raymond Williams (1981) called 'lived cultures', where culture is produced through everyday living: the food people eat, the fashions they adopt, the entertainment they prefer or the festivals they celebrate. To study a society is to study culture. Culture is about communication and making meaning. These meanings then create identities. Cultural Studies thus believes that people leading their everyday lives produce culture. Culture is not some distinct realm produced elsewhere to be consumed by the people. It is the consequence of experiences and responses. It is in the 'everyday' that makes a culture. Cultural Studies investigates this process of making culture. According to author John Storey, there are various definitions of popular culture. The quantitative definition of culture has the problem that too much "high culture" eg television dramatizations of Jane Austen are also "popular". Pop culture is also defined as the culture that is

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"leftover" when we have decided what high culture is. However, many works straddle the boundaries, we can take for example the works of William Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, Leo Tolstoy, and George Orwell.

Culture is an umbrella term which encompasses language, art, religion, history, and politics.Jean Baudrillard argued that the vague conception of public opinion is a subjective and inaccurate illusion which is more complicit in populism rather than in factuality, for it attributes sovereignty to consumers that they do not really possess.

Storey claims that popular culture emerged from the urbanization of the Industrial Revolution. Studies of Shakespeare (by Weimann, Barber, or Bristol, for example) locate much of the characteristic vitality of his drama in its participation in Renaissance popular culture, while contemporary practitioners like Dario Fo and John McGrath use popular culture, in its Gramascian sense that includes ancient folk traditions (the commedia dell'arte).(9)

Popular culture is constantly evolving and occurs uniquely in place and time. It forms currents and eddies, and represents a complex of mutually interdependent perspectives and values that influence society and its institutions in various ways. Popular culture also called mass culture or pop culture is generally recognized by members of a society as a set of practices, beliefs, artistic output also known as, popular art or mass art and objects that are dominant or prevalent in a society at a given point in time. Popular culture also encompasses the activities and feelings produced as a result of interaction with these dominant objects. The primary driving force behind popular culture is the mass appeal, and it is produced by what cultural analyst Theodor Adorno refers to as the "culture industry."

Heavily influenced in modern times by mass media, this collection of idea permeates the everyday lives of people in a given society. Therefore, popular culture has a way of influencing an individual's attitudes towards certain topics. However, there are various ways to define pop culture. Because of this, popular culture is something that can be defined in a variety of conflicting ways by different people across different contexts. It is generally viewed in contrast to other forms of culture such as folk cults, working-class culture, or high culture, and also through different academic perspectives such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, postmodernism and more.

Cultural Studies looks at mass or popular culture and everyday life. Popular culture is the culture of the masses. It is graffiti, comic books, mass cinema(as opposed to 'art cinema'), popular music (as opposed to classical music), the open spaces of the

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city (as opposed to art galleries), sports...It is the culture of everyday life of the larger number of people.

For a very long time such forms of art were dismissed as 'inferior'. The term 'mass culture' was used pejoratively. The only 'true' culture was that of the elite members of society. The culture of the wealthy minority section of the population was projected as the 'standard' or 'true' culture. So, academic studies would look at 'great works of art' or 'classical authors', ignoring the fact that the greater number of people never viewed these art forms or read these classical authors. Standards of judgement and ideas of taste were framed using these elite forms of examples. Certain authors, forms and genres were given respectability as 'culture'. That is, the very term 'culture' came to be associated with a smaller section of the population and their tastes. What this means is that the upper classes in a society legitimized certain artefacts as 'culture'. Some objects- a painting by M.F.Husain, the writings of Rabindra Nath Tagore and William Shakespeare, the films of Satyajit Ray – acquired an aura of respectability as 'culture'. Most critics did not discuss Sidney Sheldon or the films of Manmohan Desai as 'art'', relegating them to the realm of 'popular culture'.

In the 1950s and 1960s a change in focus came about in cultural analysis. Scholars started taking popular culture seriously. In 1969 the Department of Popular Culture at Bowling Green University (USA) launched the Journal of Popular Culture. The journal carried essays on Spiderman comics, rock music, amusement parks, the detective film and other such forms of popular culture. It is in popular culture studies the Cultural Studies finds its first moments. Cultural Studies argues that culture is about the meanings a community/ society generates. This process is not easy, as those in power seek to control meanings. For this purpose certain forms of art and their meanings are treated as inferior. Reading Shakespeare or the 'great' Victorian novel is fine, but how you can be addicted to Mills and Boon and Agatha Christie? That is Mills and Boon and Agatha Christie? That is all communities quarrel over meaning. Cultural Studies argues that the objects and artefacts that are used- made sense of- by the masses must be taken seriously. Such forms of art as comic strips or the detective novel are made by the people themselves, as Raymond Williams pointed out (1983). Popular culture is, for Cultural Studies, the set of beliefs, values and practices that are widely shared. Popular culture is the set of practices, artefacts and beliefs shared by the masses, and are constituted by the everyday life of masses: the food habits, fashion, and forms of transport, the music, and the reading habits, the spaces they occupy and traverse.

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Cultural Studies addresses questions like these: why is Agatha Christie not studied in English departments when most people read Christie rather than Thomas Hardy? What are the economic and political implications of creating special outlets and exhibitions of 'tribal culture' for elite people to purchase them in metropolises? The primary driving force behind popular culture is the mass appeal, and it is produced by what cultural analyst Theodor Adorno refers to as the "culture industry". Heavily influenced in modern times by mass media, this collection of ideas permeates the everyday lives of people in a given society. Therefore, popular culture has a way of influencing an individual's attitudes towards certain topics. However, there are various ways to define pop culture. Because of this, popular culture is something that can be defined in a variety of conflicting ways by different people across different contexts. It is generally viewed in contrast to other forms of culture such as folk cults, working –class culture, or high culture, and also through different academic perspectives such as psychoanalysis, structuralism, postmodernism, and more. The common popular categories are: entertainment (such as film, music, television and video games), sports news etc. In Cultural Studies media culture is studied through an analysis of popular media culture like films, TV serials, advertisement rather than avowedly political programmes. The emphasis on popular media is because Cultural Studies believes in the power of the popular cultural forms as tools of ideological and political power. It believes that a film can suggest and promote an idealogical view far more effectively- because the audience sees it'only' as entertainment and is hence less on gaurd for idealogy and biases- than a piece of political writing.

Since, Popular culture includes media objects, entertainment fashion and trends -In context to film Pathaan- few predicted the level of success film has achieved but many are celebrating the beloved star's return to the spotlight. The film has broken all sorts of records. It is one of the highest-grossing Hindi films of all time and according to deadline, the first Bollywood movie to earn $100 million without a release in China. It's one thing to have huge box office numbers; it's another to reach these kinds of milestones. Though Bollywood is facing myriad issues, one thing is apparent: The Indian government's mission of promoting Hindu nationalism above all else has wounded Hindi cinema's freedom of expression, influence, and even profits. It seemed possible that these attempts would sink India's biggest icon as well. But it didn't. To unpack the significance of this film and the present and future we can see why Pathaan's success is attributed to much more than the substance of the movie and after a decade of divisive Hindu nationalist sentiment in India.

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Communalism and religious prejudice have always plagued this country. It's just that this current particular establishment has weaponized that compared to the previous ones. Why? Because Bollywood has maximum influence over the masses, and they realized quickly that this medium is how they will get their ideas across. Khan has been the biggest superstar of the modern era in Hindi Cinema, since the early 1990's. He has been the name that a lot of people associate with India. He has been that icon for three decades. SRK is a huge star in India and he has been trying to adapt to the changing industry.

Though the movie is full of fun and it is an action movie and the fascinating thing is it is a popcorn action movie. There is no question about the fact that Pathaan was written with Shahrukh Khan's particular situation in mind. The director and the writers all but admitted in interviews that of course it was made and designed around Shahrukh Khan's comeback. They won't go so far to say whatever political commentary they wanted to deliver through him, but there is no doubt that all of it was taken into consideration for this to work and for this film to infiltrate the top five Bollywood hits ever. SRK's character is more of a rogue agent, because he's not really working for the Indian government – he's been brought out of exile. He doesn't agree with his boss's, the colonel's methods and criticizes him. You see a dissent in the Pathaan character towards his government and the establishment. He's more of an individual. That's why we can say we have not seen this kind of patriotism in the last decade. This kind of nuance may not be from the masses. For them, it's like any other patriotic film, except Shahrukh Khan is in it. Though people are consuming it without really realizing that it's not the kind of film they think it is.

What Pathaan's success has done is given some kind of hope to an entire generation of producers and superstars and actors and technicians, who still want to make the kind of films they want to.

What kinds of identity does television project? What is the difference between state (that is, government) television programmes and say, STAR TV? What kind of age group is targeted in particular kinds of promotional material? What kinds of identity are given importance in television serials- Family, Young professionals? Youth? Business culture? What is their target audience? These questions are posed about cultural and public contexts where identities are linked to image on screen. Cultural studies are interested in the ideologies that underlie these identity-projections.

India's approach is profoundly different from China's , being in every way exogenous, outward looking, and inquisitive, and for this reason it is a society whose

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globalization may be such more implicated in the circulation of its own cultural ideas and influences. India has long history of heterogeneity, argumentative reasoning and democratic interchange, which reveal a more complicated route to democracy than purely Western inheritance.

The spirit of India's fluidity, acceptance and capacity to change is virtually embodied in the giant figure of Rabindranath Tagore, who made perhaps the defining statement of post-colonial appropriation when he said: "Whatever we understand and enjoy in human products instantly becomes ours , wherever they might have their origin." (Sen 86) This may appears as a common post-colonial, transformatory strategy but it describes six thousand years of India's cultural history as well, and it is quite clearly the operating principle of an alternative modernity.

We can always see local transformations occur in virtually every aspect of cultures throughout the world. But we can see that the Ambassador car became the symbol of local adaptation. The Ambassador cars were manufactured by the Hindustan Motor Company near Kolkata since 1957, was based on 1954 Morris Oxford. Though we find large number of automobile firms across India still the Ambassador is used as taxi in Kolkata. Since it could be easily maintained represents the very principle of alternative modernity as well as the keeping of popular culture as people of Kolkata and in handloom sector wear saris with prints of yellow taxi on the fabric.

Festivals in India are celebrated with enthusiasm and with grand fervour and it is an integral part its popular culture. These festivals allow us to share deep bonds with diverse religious and cultural traditions, and it offers a wide platform for strengthening deep roots in Indian tradition.

Traditional outfits or attires like saris, dhotis, chikan kurtas, kantha material,kanjivaram, madhubani prints and various other handloom material too brings newness and sense of belonging to the people across states. Thanks to the online sites which are bringing states closer on digital platform and it has made purchasing easier and with high demands online brands are getting good income sources. From Kashmir to Kerela people are now just a click away. Marketing strategies have promoted the selling and buying capacities of the individual. Dhotis from South India are easily accessible to people in Punjab and Phulkari work made dupatta can travel from Punjab to Pune through mail services. The aesthetics have changed and gained its roots firmer in the Indian context in the world of e-marketing services. Clothing choices often reflect regional identities, religious beliefs, and social status showcasing the diversity of Indian society.

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In Cultural Studies in India context media culture is studied through an analysis of popular media culture like films, TV serials, Bollywood, Music, Globalization and Social Media advertisement etc. Social Media platforms like Instagram, Tik Tok and Youtube have accelerated the growth of popular culture in India. Popular Culture plays a vital role in shaping and reflecting Indian society and identity. It provides a platform for shared experiences, building social bonds and creates a sense of creative belonging. It also influences individual attitudes , behaviours, and beliefs, particularly among young people.

We often see that cheaper markets in a city like Delhi offers much available garments and clothing accessories to young people who like only stylish clothes without seeing the brand name and hence the consumerism increases and culture of adapting to western clothes finds ample market for foreign investors like China, Bangladesh,Hongkong and America. The Markets like Sarojini Nagar and Tibettan Markets and various sister markets in the same locality of Greater Kailash are known for their western apparel range and lifestyle stores and sells thousands of clothes and accessories every day. Even one can find electric home appliances at dirt-cheap prices. The rejected fabric and low-priced items are available at every stall and the affordability gives rise to the popularity.

One major attraction in the market like Lajapat Nagar which is known as the heaven of shopping is a delight of finding mehndi stalls that draw women from all age groups amidst their shopping sprees.

Popular Culture promotes consumerism by associating products with desirable lifestyles and aspirations, impacting spending habits and economic choices. Advertisements, celebrity endorsements, and product placement in popular media influence consumer preferences and contribute to the growth of various industries.
 Popular Culture can be used to shape public opinion, promote ideologies, and mobilize social movements. Popular culture plays a significant role in shaping and reflecting Indian Society and identity, influencing social norms, consumer behaviour, political discourse, and national identity. It is really required to critically examine popular culture and its potential impacts, both positive and negative, to understand its complex relation with society.

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