

Model Question Paper

Ph.D. Cultural Studies

Time: 2 hours

Max Marks: 100

Instructions

- 1. Write your Admit Pass No. in the boxes provided in the answer book. Do not write your name anywhere in the answer book.**
- 2. Write all you answers only in the answer book(s) provided.**
- 3. There are four sections (A, B, and C) in the question paper. Answer only as many questions as specified at the start of each section.**

SECTION A

Write a response of about 1000 words to ANY ONE of the following (1x 40 = 40 marks).

1. Critically analyze a couple of social and political events which you consider significant for mapping out the field of contemporary cultural studies in India.
2. Elaborate your views, with specific examples, about the field of visual culture in India today.
3. According to a commentator, "It was under colonialism that caste became a single term capable of expressing, organizing, and above all "systemizing" India's diverse forms of social identity, community, and organization." Do you agree with this view? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the role of the social media today in promoting forms of "populist" politics. How does this phenomenon relate to the other prevailing forms of politics?

SECTION B

Read the passage below and answer ALL the questions that follow, in not more than 150 words each (5 x 6 = 30 marks).

The term 'popular' can have a number of different meanings: not all of them useful. Take the most common-sense meaning: the things which are said to be 'popular' because masses of people listen to them, buy them, read them, consume them, and seem to enjoy them to the full. This is the 'market' or commercial definition of the term: the one which brings socialists out in spots. It is quite rightly associated with the manipulation and debasement of the culture of the people. In one sense, it is the direct opposite of the way I have been using the word earlier. I

have, though, two reservations about entirely dispensing with this meaning, unsatisfactory as it is.

First, if it is true that, in the twentieth century, vast numbers of people do consume and even indeed enjoy the cultural products of our modern cultural industry, then it follows that very substantial numbers of working people must be included within the audiences for such products. Now, if the forms and relationships on which participation in this sort of commercially provided 'culture' depend are purely manipulative and debased, then the people who consume and enjoy them must either be themselves debased by these activities or else living in a permanent state of 'false consciousness'. They must be 'cultural dopes' who can't tell that what they are being fed is an updated form of the opium of the people. That judgment may make us feel right, decent and self-satisfied about our denunciations of the agents of mass manipulation and deception - the capitalist cultural industries: but I don't know that it is a view which can survive for long as an adequate account of cultural relationships; and even less as a socialist perspective on the culture and nature of the working class. Ultimately, the notion of the people as a purely *passive*, outline force is a deeply unsocialist perspective.

Second, then: can we get around this problem without dropping the inevitable and necessary attention to the manipulative aspect of a great deal of commercial popular culture? There are a number of strategies for doing so, adopted by radical critics and theorists of popular culture, which, I think, are highly dubious. One is to counterpose to it another, whole, 'alternative' culture - the authentic 'popular culture'; and to suggest that the 'real' working class (whatever that is) isn't taken in by the commercial substitutes. This is a heroic alternative; but not a very convincing one. Basically what is wrong with it is that it neglects the absolutely essential relations of cultural power - of domination and subordination - which is an intrinsic feature of cultural relation. I want to assert on the contrary that there is no whole, authentic, autonomous 'popular culture' which lies outside the field of force of the relations of cultural power and domination. Second, it greatly underestimates the power of cultural implantation. This is a tricky point to make, for as soon as it is made, one opens oneself to the charge that one is subscribing to the thesis of cultural incorporation. The study of popular culture keeps shifting between these two, quite unacceptable, poles: pure 'autonomy' or total encapsulation.

Actually, I don't think it is necessary or right to subscribe to either. Since ordinary people are not cultural dopes, they are perfectly capable of recognising the way the realities of working-class life are reorganised, reconstructed and reshaped by the way they are represented (i.e. re-presented) in, say, *Coronation Street*. The cultural industries do have the power constantly to rework and reshape what they represent; and, by repetition and selection, to impose and implant such definitions of ourselves as fit more easily the descriptions of the dominant or preferred culture. That is what the concentration of cultural power - the means of culture-making in the heads of the few - actually means. These definitions don't have the power to occupy our minds; they don't function on us as if we are blank screens. But they do occupy and rework the interior contradictions of feeling and perception in the dominated classes; they do find or clear a space of recognition in those who respond to them. Cultural domination has real effects - even if these are neither all-powerful nor all-inclusive. If we were to argue that these imposed forms have no influence, it would be tantamount to arguing that the culture of the people can exist as a separate enclave, outside the distribution of cultural power and the relations of cultural force. I do not believe that. Rather, I think there is a continuous and

necessarily uneven and unequal struggle, by the dominant culture, constantly to disorganise and reorganise popular culture; to enclose and confine its definitions and forms within a more inclusive range of dominant forms. There are points of resistance; there are also moments of supersession. This is the dialectic of cultural struggle. In our times, it goes on continuously, in the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost.

(From "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular'" by Stuart Hall)

1. What are the ambiguities in the term 'popular' that concern the author?
2. What, according to the author, makes the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield?
3. Comment on Hall's view that "ultimately, the notion of the people as a purely *passive*, outline force is a deeply unsocialist perspective"?
4. What does the author mean by the phrase 'false consciousness'?
5. Do you agree with the author's view there is no whole, authentic or original popular culture which exists outside the cultural power and domination? Illustrate your view with suitable examples.

SECTION C

Answer any ONE of the questions given below (1 x 30 = 30).

1) Provide translations for ANY FIVE of the following English terms in any Indian language known to you and write a short essay (500 words) on the problem posed by language for the practice of Cultural Studies in India.

1. Secularism
2. Interpellation
3. Modernity
4. Humiliation
5. Subjectivity
6. Globalisation
7. Sexuality
8. Fantasy
9. Stereotype

OR

2) In about 1000 words, describe the project that you intend to take up for your PhD research. Elaborate on your research question, hypothesis if any, the field of knowledge in which it is located, the theoretical and methodological resources you find useful, and other relevant details. (Note: This does not commit you to the same project. You are free to change the topic later, if selected).