Seminar on Cultural Studies for Post Graduate Students and Research Scholars

Panjab University, Chandigarh: The Department of English and Cultural Studies, Panjab University Chandigarh in its endeavor to offer support and encouragement to young researchers, organized a one-day seminar exclusively focusing on Cultural Studies, under the stewardship of Prof. Deepti Gupta, Chairperson, Department of English and Cultural Studies on February 20, 2020 at Golden Jubilee Hall, Panjab University, Chandigarh.

The seminar aimed to focus on various mediums of communication that inform and shape culture in fundamental ways, from the arrival of radio to YouTube, television or film, all have generated and ossified their own cultural fields over the years, creating cultures within culture. The seminar papers presented explored these various layers of culture that have begun to emerge due to the intervention of new technologies in the life of people. Papers presented in the seminar ranged from demonstrating a canonical understanding of culture to the arrival of popular culture and within it various other subcultures that playfully subvert the dominance of the classical culture; such as ‘mass culture’ or ‘celebrity culture’ that in the name of entertainment, pleasure or leisure often stupefy masses into a mode of uncritical consumerism.

Twenty papers were presented and all the presenters were awarded cash prizes along with valuable feedback by the jury. The esteemed panel of judges comprised of Prof. Pushpinder
Syal, Prof. Rajesh Sharma, Prof. Rana Nayar, and Prof. M L Raina who motivated the presenters with their encouragement and patronage. Also in attendance was Anusha Singh, a lawyer turned corporate communications consultant and writer. Her opinion pieces on gender and life’s nuances are a regular feature in leading publications like Hindustan Times, The Hindu, and Thrive Global India. An alumnus of Lady Shri Ram College and a LL.M Gold Medalist, she has and continues to work intensively with organizations in creating engaging narratives on cross-functional initiatives and industry specific innovations. It was also announced that the bi-annual journal of the department, dialog, will publish the best papers presented at this seminar.

The seminar began with Prof. Rajesh Sharma reiterating the importance of Books to give new meanings to texts. He invoked Walter Benjamin and his engagement with everyday life. The terrain of freedom he gave to the reader can help students comprehend the peasantry of Punjab and the industrial workers of Mohali. Prof. Sharma dared the scholars to be radical and not lose themselves in the boring, sterile, ostentatious pedantry of research. This was followed by Aditi and Komal who collaborated to present a paper invoking Mathew Arnold, Jonathan Swift to suggest a way to seek the self - invoking culture. This was followed by Amanbir who in her paper discussed the sustained, self- reflexive approach to queer in children’s media and the transposed culture it represents. Then came Anchal Jamwal who examined the speeches of President Obama through the prism of Transitivity of Experimental Metafunction and Interpersonal Metafunction. This was followed by Arunjot and Pauvni Sharma who collaborated to discuss how eco-criticism and women liberation go hand in hand with nature and anthropocentricism. Later, Ayushee Arora presented a paper alluding to the homosexuality and the perceived derogatory perversion it tends to encourage and superhero literature and its male gaze driven identity crises.

Keeping up with the scholarly ambiance, Deeksha Khajuria presented her paper titled “From Robbers to Revolutionaries: How the Bushrangers embodied the Antihero Archetype and became a Cultural Icon” in which she talked about the reasons for the heroic reputation awarded to the bushrangers, robbers and thieves. She discussed the colonial oppression of the aboriginals and how a shared enemy led them to identify with the criminals. This was followed by Jagsir Singh who talked about contemporary Punjabi songs and their double standard innuendoes and the gun culture they patronize. Next were Khushboo and Shubhkarman who collaborated on. This was followed by Manjit Singh who in his paper
discussed the depiction of Kashmir in journalistic media. He was followed by Parvanshi Sharma and Anisha Sindhu who collaborated on their paper to explore the reconfigured feminism of women in control of their sexuality.

Discussing the cultural aspects of illustrative Mahabharata, the next presenter Rashmi Sharma in her paper titled “The Graphic Mythologies of Mahabharata in Jason Quinn’s Kaurava Empire Vol.1” deliberated how iconographic realm of Mahabharata has come a long way from Amar Chitra Katha. Following her was Shikha Thakur who in her paper who discussed the universal falseness and subjective truth of myths and Sita’s conviction to make her own decisions in The Forest of Enchantment by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Next came Simrat Khurana who dissertated on historical amnesia which has eclipsed the narratives around the Holocaust in her paper titled “Countering Historical Amnesia through Popular Culture: Poetics of Remembering and Forgetting Holocaust and Cultural loot in Denial, The Monuments Men and Women in Gold.” Also presenting were Phaguni Bist, Pavani Gaurangi, Smrity Jayera.

Abiding by the enriching and humanizing theme of the seminar, Vijaylaxmi began her presentation by reminiscing a conversation with her grandfather and enunciating the loss of a culture, language and an identity during partition. This was followed by Vipula Sharma who in her paper discussed Ambedkar ethics in casteism struggle in rural areas. The concluding speaker for the seminar was Vishakha Goyal who elaborated on Urdu poetry which is immortalized through its oral presentation as well as by audience’s applause and brought this expository, academic sojourn to an erudite end.

The presentations were followed by a detailed and enlightening discussion by the judges wherein they gave feedback on individual papers and discussed how to improve upon them. Prof. Deepti Gupta then presented the judges with tokens of appreciation.
Prof. Sharma ended the event with an address asking the participants to not limit themselves, to go beyond the obvious, and to let go of theoretical jargons. Only then, he emphasized, can one truly understand the scope of cultural studies.

This was followed by a sumptuous lunch in the Golden Jubilee dining hall where the participants, the academia and other savants of the scholar community coalesced and discussed how the discourse of culture is saturated in rhetoric of life.

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