

## Sub theme 10 The Contested Contours of Cultures/ Cultural texts

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A cultural text—literature, art, music, cinema, media, internet, theatre, dance, fashion, food, and so on—is a creation of human labour and imagination. The forms, careers, flows, and destinies of a cultural text are mired in networks of capital, social relations and political formations. It is a means to recognize and identify power relations embedded in a society. In contravention of the Constitutional principles of justice, equality, liberty, fraternity and recognition of diversity—of gender, sexuality, caste, tribe, ethnicity, disability, religion, and so on—the nexus between knowledge and power creates and sustains hegemonic forms of control over cultures of certain groups by others. In some contexts, culture of the dominant group assumes a representative status—of standing for *all* cultures, subsuming within itself not only variations and versions but also contestations and subversions, posed by resisting subjectivities. In other contexts, epistemic violence perpetrated on the ‘Other’ is aimed at its annihilation, particularly from history.

Movements for social justice, cultural recognition and identity have interrogated the very idea of authenticity and purity in cultural texts, which in some cases have compelled not just the revision but re-organization/debunking of artistic, literary canons, genre, curriculum, language, style, form, pictorial vocabulary, idiom, and so on. In other words, *whose* culture is ‘authentic’? What are the *processes* through which it gets designated as ‘authentic’? What are the institutional practices and policies that contribute to the making of ‘authentic’ cultures?

In post-independence India, the overt and/or spectral presence of the Constitution is palpable in a range of cultural sites—both hegemonic and subaltern—in patriarchal-statist discourses as well as in movements for democracy including within the domain of the ‘private sphere’. Equally,

increasingly since the 90s, vigilante narratives of justice have emerged as an oppositional framework, located within an individualist, masculinized discourse. This is perhaps most visible in cinema, theatrical political performances, and in the anonymous zones of social media. Feminist/queer and transgender movements in India have fought long and hard battles to achieve certain historic legal judgements and institutional mechanisms intended to ensure basic gender justice in the face of entrenched power hierarchies and social relations. In recent times, we have encountered new forms of feminist collectives—the #MeToo movement and a range of local and international related articulations—which while demanding bodily integrity and workplace security for women have pushed beyond ‘due process’ through campaigns such as ‘naming and shaming’.

Paradoxically, Constitutional provisions include censorship of cultural texts that undermine freedom of expression protected within the Constitution itself. Non-normative expressions invoke obscenity laws, while articulations intended to celebrate resistance, and demand accountability to ensure alignment with Constitutional principles invite charges of sedition. Constitutional commitment of respecting the autonomy and self-determination of cultures that joined the nation on their own terms is disregarded by the State—an entity that is ironically a creation of the Constitution itself. At the same time, one needs to grapple with the renewed visibility of Constitutional articles in popular and ‘new’ cinema and digital material, foregrounding questions of gender, caste, tribe, disability, sexuality, in ways that seek to, on the one hand, deepen democratic principles, and on the other, argue for their rolling back, as part of backlash from dominant ideologies.

Finally, the Constitution itself is a cultural text in multiple ways. Most significantly, it is an embodiment not only of the normative and aspirational framework of egalitarianism but also a symbol of Ambedkarite cultural politics that stands inseparable from him in the scores of statues across the country.

This sub-theme invites papers on the following or related themes, from diverse locations—viz. oral, written, performative, visual, digital, sartorial, gastronomic texts/ cultures:

- Cultural texts as sites to create and sustain hegemonies of gender, caste, tribe, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, ability: investigation of the 'Centre'/ canon and the 'Periphery'/ margin
- Cultures of resistance; cultural texts of resistance
- Collective, sustainable, 'slow' cultures

- Imaginations of citizenship
- The Constitution as a cultural text
- Historical transactions between cultural texts and the Constitution
- Constitutional consciousness/ backdrops in popular culture
- Digital cultures
- Campuses, Cultures, Contestation