

Concept Note

**Seminar on
Interpreting Culture: Subjectivity, Ideology and Identity
February 23-24, 2017,
School of Social Sciences
Indira Gandhi National Open University**

It is widely accepted that culture creates and transforms people's understanding of social reality, everyday experience, and symbolic activities. Research in the field pursues two prominent trends: culture as practice, and culture as a system of symbols and meanings. The emphasis here is on the view of culture that treats it as enduring and steadfast. Additionally, and more predominantly, culture is viewed as a discursive construction with emphasis on how and in what way people perform, enact or play it out. The thrust here is on subjectivity, reflexivity and situatedness of culture invoking multiple realities. Expectedly, culture lends itself to much contestation, debate and discussion both in academic and general discourse. Of late, culture in India has been widely discussed in the context of economic reforms that have ushered in major transformation in society. Some important features of this transformation are: endeavour of hitherto marginalized sections of society such as Dalits, OBCs, tribals, women, religious minorities and other emergent groups. The struggle is predominantly for autonomy and self-determination that calls for, among others, questioning traditional hierarchies, contesting hegemonic ideologies and more importantly, constructing, and/or re-discovering alternative cultures and histories. Expectedly, multiplicity of newer forms of histories, icons, literature, artwork and architecture, consumption patterns, among others, feed and are fed by alternative ideologies.

There seems to be a welcome explosion in research on these issues – new issues are being addressed, new theories and perspectives are being developed, the old ones are being critiqued. In order to deliberate on new areas of research on cultural issues, the School of Social Sciences,

IGNOU proposes to hold a two-day seminar on interpreting culture in February 2017. Bringing together insights from diverse disciplines, this seminar positions itself in a way to facilitate discussion surrounding interpretation of culture. It seeks to address following questions: What does culture mean to people? In what way do people negotiate their identity within the frame of culture? What are the emergent forms of culture? What are major cultural issues which have arisen in the current phase of social transition in India, i.e., era of economic reforms/neoliberal phase? How can we explain and accommodate search for alternative cultural symbols by hitherto neglected social groups – Dalits, women, tribals, regions with certain social-cultural specificities? How do dominant cultural groups respond to the attempts by marginal groups to search for alternative cultural identity? How does the state respond to the cultural issues of different sections of the society? More specifically, the objective of the seminar is to develop fresh ways of interpreting culture incorporating subjectivities, ideologies and representations.

It is envisaged that discussion would chiefly center around following themes: **Perspectives and Frameworks for Interpreting Culture; Historical Dynamics of Culture, Media and Art; Culture of Consumption; Issues of Cultural Marginality and Resilience; Nationalism and Identity; and Role of the State and Civil Society.**

The seminar team invites abstracts in about 500 words on the themes mentioned above. Abstracts may be mailed at seminarsoss@ignou.ac.in. **Last date for receipt of abstracts is November 15, 2016.**

Intimation of accepted abstracts will be sent to the participants by November 30, 2016.

The paper presenters will be provided accommodation and local hospitality.