

**Disability Studies: An Introduction**  
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**Lecture 11**  
**Dependency**

Welcome back to our lecture series on disability studies. Today the concept is “Dependency”. For a lot of you, this may not sound like a big deal, but dependency is what we end up in a lot more time than what we acknowledge. So what is dependency and how we can think systematically about it is the question that we are going to address. Alright, before getting into dependency let's try to broadly speculate on independence. Lot of say, well, no, I'm independent. I'm capable of climbing the mountain, don't get into my business I am capable of doing this and that. My space, my world, my home. I am the master of the destiny and so on. The list may go on which we will end up uttering at some point in life, so we all have some sense of independence as well. Alright, so what is it? On one hand, or one extreme, independence is about self-sufficiency that is, one is comfortable with oneself. That's not a bad idea at all I would say. One is in peace with oneself, one can meet basic requirements oneself, but one cannot do that all the time. The next level, independence can mean self-reliance, well, although that is not totally possible all the time. We would like to be self-reliant people, no matter what is one's condition or incapacity one would like to be self-reliant. For example, a grand old man would like to be self-reliant about may be switching on the fan near his bed, although he is bedridden, he doesn't want to disturb his grandchildren while they study. Many of you may be in that situation, your grandpa may ask, hey can switch on the fan? No grandpa I am studying. So he would end up making an ingenious provision where he can actually pick up his crutches and just switch on the fan switch there. And thirdly self-determination can also be a mark of independence. What did I mean by that? Well, it's kind of a rule that one sets on oneself. You know I can do this, I can do that. You don't put words into my mouth and that means one has a point of view that needs to be told. A child has a point of view, and a disabled person has a point of view, and so does a nondisabled, a poor, a rich anyone even person who is in so-called within quotations, “vegetative” condition has some amount of self-determination. There is even muscle memory;

muscular action can say that the person who is in that very vegetative situation does not like something done to that person. So it is self-determination that determines politics. I vote to this party as opposed to that party. It is self-determination that makes people choose religious beliefs, orientations, ideologies point of views, persuasions and so on. Now we sort of understand what is independence? All these things either in isolation or in some combination make people sense of independence, then does dependency mean it is the opposite of all these things. No, dependency mean, does not mean lack of self-sufficiency or lack of self-reliance or lack of self-determination. It only means there is some connectivity conjoined about it.

Let me explain, a child will need parents for self-expression and flourishing. Child after all, is not a fully grown adult he or she will need protection affection and care of her parents to come up, to speak up to do anything or to build her own dolls house. So in some sense all of us will need to agree to the fact that there is this dependency that we need to rely on or we need to seek recourse to in our everyday lives. How can we think more systematically about dependency then? There are some registers, meaning ways of language expressions to understand dependency. First one is one would say economic dependence. This might have struck you right in the beginning, economic dependence is one of the highest form of or visible form of dependence. For example, many of you who are pursuing college education now are economically dependent on your parents, and few years down the lane when your parents are retired, they may be the economically dependent on you or even among your parents, your mom may be economically dependent on your father. Traditionally in Indian societies, at least in the previous generation, my generation and even father's generation, women did not give fuller accent on economic independence of self-sufficiency. Economic dependence also mean that each system relies on the other, a buyer will rely on the seller and the seller will rely on customer and there is a economic chain, production chain, consumption chain going on and the entire ecosystem of market economy depend on series of economic dependences. Economic dependence can lead to violence, potentially economic dependence may lead to power imbalance, say a man of the house may have more power over womenfolk at the house and so on. So economic dependence can also be structurally created certain caste and class groups may make others economically depend on them and make a system that work in their favourite's called hegemony.

Let's move on, what are the other registers of dependence then, political dependence, economics alone is not the factors that drive dependence and political dependence also can play a huge role. For example, some societies favour certain caste groups. People who are in the jail depend on their supervisors politically. Because of lack of distribution of justice and wealth some economic groups may become permanently politically dependent on others, political dependence also can be established via structures such as patriarchy. Male dominance, if it is structurally established can make women politically dependent. Until early part of the 20th century, women did not have right to vote in many societies and nations for example. Socio- legal dependence, lots of us are in that situation when we are legally set to be different or dependent. How?

In a school students are legally dependent on teachers for education, caring and protection. Children are called legally dependent. During migration visa and all, as spouse can be called a dependent. This kinds of dependences come with certain responsibilities and some limitations. When you go to some countries as spouse does not get a right to work in which case there is a power balance problem working at the house and in the society and so on. May not be also, but that's entirely possible. Legal dependence is forced on people with mental disability who do not behave as expected by others. They may not be violent. They may not be morally deviant, they may not be this and that but there is a sanction of legal dependence on them. They are not given voting rights, they are not given contractual rights such as buying a house or adopting a child. Charecterological dependence, by the word charecterological I don't mean moral character, or he is a bad character or she's a bad character and so on. That is not what I meant. It is about the development of personhood. Personhood is made up of emotions and attachments and we all depend on one or other person, makeno mistake, a person cannot exist without a moment where one is not dependent on one or other person. That gives me a funny thought actually, in 21st-century we are dependent on mobile phones too. Facebook or in another 10 years if somebody has to hear this lecture or you might they may think, Mr Hemachandran you have neglected robotic dependence. We may depend on robot to may be at our beck and call.

Charecterological dependence can take many shapes. For example, romantic love is based on mutual dependence for love, desire, companionship and so on. In characterological dependency area many other things may work, one may become totally empty, meaning one can become a

known person where one gives oneself totally to the other person it is quite possible. Or mutually enriching characterological dependence can also transpire. There is no hard and fast rule for all these things. Well, somebody else says there is fifth kind of register or way of thinking about dependence, it is called dependence of inevitability. What is that? It just means that we are inevitably dependent on each other. That's it. No matter what one does, no matter what one says about oneself, one is ruthlessly dependent on somebody else or something or some idea to say the least. Even ideological dependence can happen right. A bhakta can be dependent soulfully on God the Almighty for salvation. It can be as abstract and embodied as that. Now we have talked about independence and what it means to several people in different context. Then we had a brief glimpse of what is dependence, registers and so on. What's the problem with it?

There could be many problems. One of the chief problem is infantilization, since we are doing a course on disability let's straightaway get into the problem here. Talking about personhood, one can say a disabled person can potentially feel diffident about being dependent. That is because they can potentially experience infantilization, meaning a 40-year-old man woman who is disabled take for example, can be grabbed by an arm, given a plate of food plate of food or given a bus ticket or any task, whether that person likes it or not is not asked. He or she is treated as though she is an infant who will automatically need some advise, care, disapproval and so on. That one evil effect potential one. The second one is sociological one, larger structural problem. For example, if dependency is seen as a primary characteristic of people with disability then they can potentially face isolation actually for generations together. Not surprisingly someone like Mike Oliver, the harbinger of social model of disability about which we talked in the earlier class declares that dependency has shaped lives of people with disability all along. Naturally looking through the prism of structural violence and so on many disabled people may hate the word dependent. I'm not dependent, I am independent. I work with my mobility cane, I read Braille, I teach and they may garner many other characteristics from their life. I'm a mom, I am a father this and that, so that they establish their credentials of being in this world. Thirdly, dependency may also have the stigma that some and many, many disabled people are not productive enough. Well you sit there and I will give you food, will anyone like a life where one is repeatedly told, don't do anything, I will give you money for food and do everything for you, but just be in a room. Particularly for young people who are in their productive age this is totally unacceptable.

The word dependency can also carry the stigma that one is inadequate in terms of personhood or legal entity. I told you the case about mental disability and many other situations.

Now what we do from here. Well, or alternatively, how have disabled people overcome the stigma attached to them or to dependency. One in the first instance, many have removed the myth worked on meticulously to remove the myth that dependency is a woefully negative condition. Second, they have actually challenged dependency that is forced on them by doing something else. For example, independent living movements around the world are a testimony to a moral and sociological challenge on stigma attached to dependence. Indian independent living movements, ILM, to make it short flourished in America, Europe during 1960s. In fact, independent living movements are antidote to a long and painful history of institutionalisation of people with disability that happened in the West. Foucault's History of Madness is a living testimony of long and long periods of incarceration or imprisonment forced on people with mental disability. In fact, the entire Enlightenment project dependent on the idea that madness is the other of rationality. So lots of people were huddled and put into invisible spaces out of sight, out of mind. So just push them away, raise four walls against them and forget about them. Give them some food and sustenance so that you don't feel morally bad. They were chained, treated badly, connected lobotomy that is some kind of brain surgery and after that they will be peaceful forever without any drives from inside. So this is the history that independent living movements aimed to rebel against.

In India lot of self-help groups flourish as a mode of independent living movement. Independent living moment in India does not mean you live away from your family, you hate your brother, sister, mom and kinship friends, that's nonsense, that's not the case. It's about demonstrating that oneself is sufficient, one is useful to the other, one is capable of being interdependent and one is capable of being socially amenable person. The entire leprosy movement in India, Jim Staples, I strongly refer you to Jim Staples' book on leprosy in his anthropological work in India. "we're one disease, one community alright. So the leper community, rather in under the age to come together, help each other make products make themselves assertive make a political statement on their interdependence, say that they're not dead yet and they matter, untouchability on leprosy is unsustainable and unacceptable and so on. So concluding remarks, in the first part

of this talk I just gave a glimpse on the binary, independence and dependence. To answer the first question, is it myth or real. Independence can be a myth when it is seen in absolute terms, dependency can equally be a myth if it is seen only in stigmatic way. Both are real and both are embodied. That is all I want to say. Thank you.