

Disability Studies: An Introduction
Prof. Hemachandran Karah
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture 8

Ableism: Part 2

All right welcome back. This is the second talk on ableism. I call this “ableism”. A few examples, talking about examples I have three examples for you here with their own vocabulary if you like. They are one, visionism two, sanism coming from the word sanity and three audism coming from the word auditory. Let me start with sanism as an example, as you may have already predicted sanism has to do with the word sanity sanity means that privileging sanity, sound mind in a sound body as they say. In the pre-modern time, people who spoke different, who appeared different or who may have been thinking differently may not have been unduly separated maybe it is considered gods different manifestation in a sense, they were not treated as unwanted species. This is not to you know without reservation celebrate premodern, not at all. There were instances, millions of it when people, children were put to death because they looked different. Make no mistake that the notion of “Divyaang” that people are discussing about is actually a premodern idea where you call “Divyaang”. Someone as God’s child, some of that kind is actually attributing divine characteristic to disable this is actually a premodern idea. But let's come to sanism now, in the industrialised world and in the post-industrialised world, sanity is important, for example, if I have signed a legal contract, then I should understand the contents of the document. I should know what I'm talking about what I'm getting into. Sanity is also expected of a voter that is voting this particular party, so on. Sanity is also in some sense is connected to even private life. A rational father keeps rule at home I mean order and so on.

The above examples, privilege or require people to possess will individual will and capacity to analyse and three rationally choose their lifestyles and persuasions. Now what are the problems with it? Is it no required all these things, yes it does. But the problem is that alone cannot rationality, for example alone cannot explain one's social contract. For example, I'm giving a talk now, besides an intellectual capacity to enter in a conversation with you in this instance in a

distance mode I will also require an emotional investment in this lecture. Take an instance of two people a boy and a girl who are more than eighteen, well the law recognises that they are adults. They can talk to each other, they can make sense of how their lives can be shaped or will be shaped in the future. They can take decision even to get wedded. Now is that all? Is capacity alone ruling them? No. Their emotional investment in each other is also depends on what they feel about each other, how they project each other to their selves, how they identify, how they weigh each other's vulnerabilities, how they come to terms with each other's cultural baggage and much more. And maybe how they handle an instance of anger with each other.

In the domestic space and beyond more than rationality and will comes to play. So in understanding one's legal position, citizenship, property right, human right, contracts of varied kinds we need to consider something more than will coalition and sanity. To do otherwise, one can call it sanism. Let me quote an example here, in the video, the link that I'm sending you is about a Tamil movie not so distant past ago. Few years ago, it's called "Deiva Thirumagal", it means divine daughter okay. It's about a man, madman he is insane. He inherits a daughter. She is not mad and she is called Nila. But his in-laws, think sister-in-law sues him to get back the child from him because he simply cannot raise his daughter. So the matter goes to the court of law where it is argued, the argument goes on. In the final climax scene in which I'm leaving it to you for seeing what happens here is the lawyers argue in fact the prosecutor, ask him can you raise your daughter, do you know your daughter's school, do you know what is puberty, do you know when she will become a woman? Can you teach her a lesson, a homework and myriad other questions to which he buckles, he has registered nothing.

But now what happens, in the end, when the judgement is almost going to be against his favour, when the arguments are going on in the court, the father and daughter have a tiny happy play between them the daughter gets on his back and they curdled each other, have a great play you know and everybody gets to see it, and then the prosecutor gives up well. I would like to be defeated in this instance. In the end this man hands of the daughter to his sister-in-law, with the hope that she will be raised well. You can dismiss all these as Tamil masala you can do that, you're welcome to do that. But the fact of the problem is this, it is one of the nicest instances of sanism, where sanity is under law privileges sanity to get into social contracts and you should be

in the right frame of mind and so on. And there cannot be hard argument about it, but in this instance, and many others it is entirely possible that paternal role can be changed. Instead of father being a great protector, a great overarching boss of the family, he can be cared for by a daughter like this. She can grow up slowly learning how to care an adult. An adult can also be under a young person's care and my capacity for sanity may also be interdependent. For example, I may draw on my wife, my children, my friends by mom and others for my sanity. My sanity depends on their well being and their fuller and meaningful connectedness to me. Sanity therefore need not always be an individual's property which can come handy in a contract position. There are some and many other subtler aspects of this kind that can go unnoticed if one privileges sanity as an individual's state of affair, only to be seen performed in a contract position, to do so is sanism and to be sanist is to be abilist that is my connection with the previous lecture. This is one form of ableism or sanism.

Let's come to visionism, vision is the framework I use for my doctoral work actually. It's nice that it coming handy for me now. Visionism as an idea was proposed by a blind philosopher Martin Milliken in a series of lectures with Brian Maggie another philosopher, it's a kind of letter correspondence. I recommend that you all read it. It's called "On blindness, letters between Brian Maggie and Martin Milliken" that's the name of the book. Both the philosophers argue what is blindness and more importantly what its connection with sight or vision. Secondly, what its connection with empiricism that is the art of observation, Martin Milliken goes on to say because sights privilege position in the art of observation, many people tend to privilege sight as a special distort or special position much superior to anything else available. For example, one may be denied a chance to become a teacher of science or practitioner of medicine or judge in a court because one cannot see. It seems capacity to see and observe, a phenomenon in sciences instance, observe chemical reactions, in the low court observe the persons who come to the law court of law, a clientele and so on is a virtue, and that virtue cannot be compromised in any instance.

To privilege sight alone or the capacity to see, see alone or other senses are rather faculties of understanding matters, Martin Milliken says is nothing but visionism, meaning privileging vision over vision capacity for seeing over others. Well liked sanism, visionism can also be

discriminatory. Besides being discriminatory it can also exclude and undermine talents that lie beyond a capacity for seeing. For example, why should one undermine synaesthesia, a capacity to deploy multiple senses for example, facial expression can be understood by a blind person by voice. This is a very interesting idea Martin Milliken proposes and visionism again is another instance of able-ism you see. And visionism can also be a modern idea because only social contracts, political contracts, legal contracts have such rigid notions built around them. If can't observe a clientele or if you can't see somebody's face, law court would claim you can't really pass judgement. You can't really make fuller assessment or meaningful assessment. Multiple episodes, films abound to illustrate the discriminatory nature of visionism.

Now let me come to the third demonstration example of able-ism, which is called audism, as you may have predicted the best part of humanity is also made up of people who can't hear at all, can hear somewhat and who's hearing capacity is slowly going away. There are people who are born deaf as well. If you look at a deaf infant, for example, a deaf infant, like other infant may cry for mother's attention or babble you know. A deaf even infant on the other hand, may babble using gestures, feet and hand and face. A deaf infant may make sounds, but communicate with mother with gestures. Gestures naturally occurring to the infant. Naturally, deaf infant when she grows up, develops a special predisposition or affection for sign language or the language of gesture that is local to her culture. You know what our schools and colleges will require a sign language translator to make lessons accessible to this child as she grows up. However, one can always force that child to do lip reading, closely observe the lips of the other person as they speak, the child may also be told in such a way she can feel inferior about being not able to hear, not able to use verbal language that I'm speaking to you. She may be made to feel ashamed to use sign language.

So what is happening here undue privilege of hearing culture and auditory perspective, undue discrimination of gestural language, the language of gesture this is called audism. And this is going on full-fledged to understand whether one is an audist or not, whether one is imposing one's hearing culture view on other deaf person you have to step into the shoes of a deaf person to understand that. Otherwise, we will assume that I am not in an ableist. Examples I am not a visionist, not a sanist and not an audist and many other is if you like. But only by practice

introspection and by asking one will know what is happening. Now the last part of the lecture, what can we do with able-ism sponce are given three examples are you refer to an essay that I wrote actually on these three isms and the idea of ableism. The link is provided to you, part of a book published in India. But more importantly, what we do with able-ism as a notion, well able-ism is an ideological framework.

If you like it is a sort of ideological hyper- valuation of one's capacity for thought, action, bodily perfection. Mind you it is not normalcy, it is the perfection, muscular, cognitive, emotional and free from vulnerability. That's not going to happen, we all are vulnerable at various stages in life and we will continue to be vulnerable and that's the truth about life. So what we do here, able-ism can aid, if you're a student of policy studies, It will help you to craft policies that are less ableist. If you're a student of literature, then the idea of able-ism will help you in understanding the notion of ability across time spaces and cultures, and most importantly, it may give you a philosophical framework in which you can launch critic of save the notion of say will or contract power equations died of aesthetics and so on. And if you're a student of medicine this will go a great deal in listening to or making sense of the agency of patients who come to you for help. I hope this helps. Thank you.