

Literary and Cultural Disability Studies: An Exploration
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Lecture – 2
Introduction to LCDS – Part 1

Hello all welcome again, a very warm welcome. I feel immensely pleased to offer this new course. It is called literary and cultural disability studies an exploration. This is the next level course to our course on disability studies and introduction. Thank you for a great success, building on that let us do this new course. Hereafter, I am going to fondly call this course LCDS, literary and cultural disability studies.

It is meant to give insights into methods, approaches, forms of interpretations, analysis, explanations that come with disability and its interface with literature in a broader sense of the term. Because of this broader understanding, we will do analysis of culture folklore, film, etc. okay. How do I introduce this course? In many ways, this course has 4 broad modules if you like.

Let us walk through one by one and what we may be doing in those modules. So that is what this introductory lecture is all about. So the first idea of LCDS it means that there should be and is a canon available. So, in some sense canon formation is the first model in which we will have several lectures. As you see all disciplines; social sciences, humanities, sciences and so on they build their own canons.

Canon defined as in Greek it signifies some kind of a measuring rod or a rule. Over a period of time, it meant list of books, the Hebrew Bible the new and the old testaments. It is made up of several books, in fact bible is a library which hosts many books actually, but in a secular sense canon can mean works or archive of an author, say the students of English can recognize this.

The chosen canon, Shakespeare canon, canon of postcolonial write canon involving dalit literature and so on. The list may go on. Here, therefore in the first module which is canon formation we will be talking about the ways in which means by which LCDS, literary and

cultural disability studies for its flourishing how canon can be built and is built. Clearly, I am not building the canon.

I am only in some sense walking with you through the canon that is in the formation stages. Many achievements have happened in that respect. So let us take a canon in its various senses. In the first sense, canon may mean archive. Archive means some kind of a storage house of materials on a given subject, say disability and literature. How do we build an archive? There are one traditional way of doing it say exploring ancient epics Ramayana, Mahabharata, Iliad, Odyssey and so on.

And see and explore those epics for characterization, plot, verse formations and so on that broadly connect with the idea of disability, the king Dhritarashtra the blind king and the myth of Odysseus it was complex the act of blinding and so on. So, visit ancient and modern medieval literatures and so on for traces of disability characterization, disability topology, disability genre and so on that is one way traditionally.

But there is a revisionist way of doing the tradition as well. Feminism has hugely benefited by revisionist historiography. Basically, revisiting the old materials in light of our own life, in light of century realities that involve gender politics, social contract views of the present new bodily aesthetics and all the kind of stuff. So seeing old things in new light it is not like old wine in new bottle.

It is not as ridiculous as that, but it is a new way of looking at old things. Why do we do that? because past does not die, it mutates, it gains new shapes as newer and newer generations keep revisiting the traditions. So this strand is called new historicism. So, we will have examples from both the ways, I mean traditional historiography looking things as they were and revisionism which involves new historicist ways of visiting old archive.

And the second way of forming an archive is to in some sense seeing things in new light, giving a new point of view, rehabilitate stereotypes, a critic would call that counter diagnosis. So, just

because we inherited different old materials ancient materials classical ones, we do not have to necessarily keep them as they are. We can give a counter diagnosis as it were.

For example Tobin Siebers, one of the important critics, he is no more, he says my withered limb is my complex. Look at that. You have a withered limb broken, instead of saying that is a disadvantage you end up saying it is a compass, compass gives new directions, a new sense of life. If you like if you can call it a GPS for life. So, the withered limb is onspicuous, maybe others see it as a repaired or broken limb.

But for him it gives new purpose, new modalities of navigating human relationships and so on. So, therefore he calls it a compass, you see. So canon formation as a counter diagnosis in creating new it can tutor an untutored eye, it can give new philosophical outlook. It can give new perspectives that never existed, right. So that is one of the ways in which canon can be formed so far traditional and new historicist way of forming an archive.

Second telling a new story that can break old stereotypes and old ways of false ways of looking at disability called counter diagnosis. And the third way in which the LCSS canon can wiggle is to create an archive of discourse analysis and so on, so that means building new vocabulary, new point of view. For example we will visit a concept such as visionism.

Visionism framed by Martin Milligan is an approach that says there is an undue emphasis on sightedness in a way it discriminates people who have sight loss and privileging vision in this sense is called visionism. The moment you develop such perspective, suddenly new social realities, new literary narratives become or come to surface that have certain traces of visionism, so you have a torch light in that sense.

You have a torch light called visionism and you sort of point out some dark spots out there and because of this powerful touch light some dark spots and human thought come into picture. So, this is again one more way of forming a canon. So, what am I saying in a course such as LCDS, we will be revisiting, doing, analyzing, examining ways in which canon get formed because canon is the central force that drive all disciplines.

In fact, any discipline is possible when we attend to the canon question okay. The second module about this course is literary criticism under the broader topic literary criticism, why? Well, whether you are a feminist or you are interested in the problem of race, ethnic, politics, cost, globalization, material history, anything you will require a capacity for close reading of the literary narratives or cultural narratives or film narratives anything.

When it comes to literature for example one will have to develop a skill to understand workings of poetry such as rhythm, meter, textuality and so on. When it comes to film analysis one may require skills to understand camera techniques, celluloidal projection, audience participation, character making, film production, choreography and much more. So these techniques there is a view that if one is a close reader, one develops close reading one becomes a apolitical that is not true.

Attention to style, rhythm and such things can give huge understanding to politics without a doubt. For example let me draw your attention to things such as practical criticism promoted by I. A. Richards in Cambridge in early twenties. I. A. Richards gather graduate students in his class and circulated poem samples. For I. A. Richards and his students it seems the poem, a piece of poetry revealed itself in the fullest sense of the term.

If you attend and if you know the workings of vocabulary, rhythm, style, techniques of the poem you know everything. You will know everything what you need to know according to them. Well, clearly that is some kind of reductionism but what practical criticism teaches now of course pract crit or practical criticism was later on developed as new criticism in America.

The thing is closer attention to the workings of the text in all its details including rhetorical, persuasion helps us to know where and how it enters politics of the moment, where it is received, where it is performed and where it animates in the minds and bodies of people okay and thus came political performance and so on. If you like why do I get into this literary criticism method at all?

Well, we do believe that practical criticism is about the body of the text and the body of the text is simply entangled with the body of the readers. For example take an instance such as novel. Novel requires individual immersion into it, maybe you develop some kind of acoustic bubble around you, it is like somebody tethered to an iPod with headphone.

While your parents are doing household chores you might be you know stuck into Harry Potter's magic world and fully transported into that world sitting in Chennai and you also develop an acoustic shield as it were around you so that whoever calls you from distance you are totally unaware. So, novel therefore is an individualist connection and therefore novel as a literary form came into existence only when individual modernity came into being from eighteenth century onwards.

Before eighteenth century there was no novel at all. Take another example several sonnet 4 stanzas and 4 stanzas take the argument builds as it were from childhood to youth fullness to middle age and old age. Shakespeare sonnets 4 stanzas have four seasons with them, four stages of life, four elements of life and much more. It is like the textual body imitating the body politics of life.

Take another example of another form of text autobiography. It is all about oneself. Several studies including deaf studies or gender studies have made fuller use of autobiography in its various forms. Nowadays people call life writing because life writing is much more than autobiography because life writing can include many forms of self expression such as diary, letters, simple scribble on the wall, graffiti, a simple bodily gesture and so on.

So, I will do practical criticism to get into the heart of the finer connect between textual forms and expressions involving disability. So what are the examples of writing I may take to illustrate this? Well, I may take instances of deaf poetry, conditions such as Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's involve deaf poetry for example involve sign language and signs in various assertions reveal the greatness of sign language as much as the politics connected with it.

Similarly Alzheimer's narrative may talk about memory, its wandering nature, its disjunctive characteristics. And the stream of memories that are willing to animate and conserve themselves, it revise very rare things about human condition. So what am I saying in literary criticism module I will pay closer attention to the text, is that all about literary criticism? No, I will also pay closer attention to context. What does that mean? I will speak about that in a minute or two. Thank you.