

Literature, Culture and Media
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Lecture – 21
Intersectionality

Dear participants welcome to the 5th week of our discussion on Literature, Culture and Media. In the previous module, we have discussed the development of feminist theory, how gradually it comes into a discussion of the issues of gender, masculinities and the queer and later on we have also touched upon the media representation of the issues of gender very briefly.

Now we have also seen how the issues of gender have necessarily intersected with race leading gradually to a postcolonial argument. So, you would find that there is a link in the way these theoretical approaches have developed in the late 20th century taking a particular shape giving us a particular idea to base our worldview on. So today we would begin our discussion on intersectionality.

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Intersectionality

- “Intersectionality is the systematic study of the ways in which differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other sociopolitical and cultural categories interrelate” (Aristea Fotopoulou 2012).
- Concept emerged during the 1960s, during radical and multiracial feminist movements.
- Other parallel origins can also be traced
 - 19th century – Sojourner Truth (“Ain’t I A Woman?”) and Anna Julia Cooper
 - Concept of "simultaneity" advanced during the 1970s by members of a Boston Group which contended that our lives, and forms of resistance to domination, were overpoweringly shaped by the simultaneous influences of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

“Intersectionality is the systematic study of the ways in which differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity or other sociopolitical and cultural categories interrelate” (Aristea Fotopoulou 2012). The concept of intersectionality had emerged in 1960s during the radical and multiracial feminist movements. In our discussion of radical feminist theory, we had seen how women critics were dissatisfied with the way the anti-apartheid movement had

been dominated by black men and the feminist movement had been dominated by the white men. This was in fact one of the beginnings of radical feminist movement. Other parallel signs of similar ideas can also be traced, for example, in the 19th century, we have what later on came to be known as an article “Ain’t I A Woman?” It was a speech by Sojourner Truth, one of the former slaves, who had also talked about how an African origin woman had to face more discrimination in comparison to a black male.

Similarities can also be traced in the works of Anna Julia Cooper. The concept of simultaneity on similar lines was also developed around 1970s by members of a Boston-based group, which conducted that not only our lives, but our forms of resistance are also overpoweringly shaped by the simultaneous influences of race, class, gender and sexuality.

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- Since the late 1970s, attempts to analyze differences of race, class and ethnicity as single and mutually exclusive categories has been rejected and dismissed as ethnocentric and imperialistic
- The actual term of “intersectionality theory” was first used in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw of UCLA School of Law in her essay, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics ”

So, we have seen that since the late 1970s, attempts to analyse differences of race, class, et cetera, including ethnicity as single and mutually exclusive categories had been rejected effectively and dismissed as being ethnocentric and imperialistic. However, we did not have a particular term for giving a signification to this concept. The actual term of ‘intersectionality theory’ was for the first time used in 1989 by Kimberley Crenshaw of UCLA School of Law in her essay titled “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”.

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- Crenshaw's then somewhat academic term is now at the forefront of national conversations about racial justice, ethnic differences, identity politics, policing, disabilities—and over the years has helped shape legal discussions.
 - It studies how parallel and mutually reinforcing systems of power affect the people who are marginalized.
- Patricia Hill Collins strengthened the initial idea and enhanced the scope of the term, including not only the black women, but all women.
 - Like Crenshaw, Collins argued that cultural patterns of oppression are interrelated and bound together.
 - Influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity
 - Trans border constructions of racial and cultural hierarchies

Crenshaw had used this term in an academic manner, but you would find that this somewhat academic term has now come to the forefront of national conversations and international debates about racial justice, ethnic differences, identity politics, policing, disability contentions and over the years we would find that her idea of intersectionality has helped shape legal decisions and policy.

It has studied how parallel and mutually reinforcing systems of power affect the people who are marginalised in any given society. Later on we find that this idea of Crenshaw was further developed and strengthened by the writings of Patricia Hill Collins, who also enhanced the scope of the term and included not only the discussion of black women, but also the discussion of women belonging to ethnicity or rather the viewpoint and the perspective of all women.

Like Crenshaw, Collins had also argued that cultural patterns of operations are interrelated and bound together. And they are also influenced by those systems of society such as race, gender, class and ethnicity and these systems are overlapping, they do not work in isolation, but they work in tandem and they are the constructions of racial and cultural hierarchies. So, she has also talked about that the trans-border constructions and understandings of cultural and ethnic differences should also be taken into consideration.

So we find that over the years the term which Crenshaw had initially used as an academic indication of things which were already there, you know, which were already felt by the

feminist philosophers has gradually developed into an all-encompassing debate incorporating the demands of those people who are marginalised in our societies.

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- The theory is based on the concept that oppressive institutions within a society (racism, ageism, sexism, homophobia) do not act independently, but are instead interrelated and continuously shaped by one another.
- Develops a black feminist critique that emphasizes the problems inherent in treating race and gender as *mutually exclusive categories* of experience and analysis.
- Critiques the inadequacies of single-axis analysis of exploitation and discrimination in anti-discrimination law, feminist theory and anti-racist policy discourse.

The theory of intersectionality is based on the concept that oppressive institutions within any society be it racism, sexism, ageism, or homophobia, they do not act independently, but they are interrelated and they are continuously shaped and strengthened by each other. She had also developed a black feminist critique that had emphasized that the problems inherited the treatment of race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis are wrong.

Critiques the inadequacies of single-axis analysis of exploitation and discrimination in anti-discrimination law, feminist theory, anti-racist policy discourse and it is this last point which I think is one of the most significant contributions by Crenshaw.

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- Articulates the positionality and experience of women of color who experience violence at the intersection of race and gender.
- Multidimensionality of experiences by looking at the intersections of race and gender to look at structural, political and representational issues arising out of such single-axis analysis of identity, experience and exploitation.

She has articulated the positionality and experiences of women of color, who experience violence at the intersection of race and gender and we find that the multidimensionality of experiences by looking at the intersections of race and gender to look at the structural, political and representational issues arising out of such single-axis analysis of identity, experience and exploitation. Crenshaw had taken up certain significant argumentative steps when she published her essay in 1989.

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Important arguments in Crenshaw's 1989 Essay

- Intersectional experiences of black women in terms of race and gender is more than the sum of racism and sexism.
 - Single-axis analysis distorts the experiences of women of color and limits the politics of feminist theory and anti-racist policies.
 - Erasure of black women
- In cases of racial discrimination, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex or class-privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race and class-privileged women.
 - Inquiry is normally limited to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group

So you would find that the more significant contribution she had made in this essay was this idea that the intersectional experiences of black women in terms of race and gender is more than the sum of racism and sexism, that we cannot incorporate their understanding fully if you look at them only from the perspective of racism or only from the perspective of sexism. So, a single axis analysis of the experiences of black women's exploitation, distorts

experiences of women of colour and limits the politics of feminist theory and anti-racist policies.

It amounts according to Crenshaw; it amounts to an eraser of black women. In cases of racial discrimination, discrimination tends to be viewed in terms of sex or class privileged blacks and in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race and class privileged women. Her idea was that the enquiry is normally limited to the experiences of those sections or those members of the group who are already privileged in some ways. For example, when it is an issue of racial discrimination normally it is the point of view of a black man which is hurt and when it is something which is related with gender then it is the perspective of a white woman which is hurt. So according to Crenshaw this amounts to the erasure of experiences of black women or women of colour.

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- Thus, those policy discourses which do not take intersectionality as a framework fail to understand the specificities and particularities of the ways in which black women experience subordination and exploitation.
- Antidiscrimination laws are framed by single-axis analysis of discrimination.
- As such, their limitations are based on normative understanding of discrimination that is not informed by intersectionality. As a result, they are insufficient in their remedial scope and reveal the limits of such laws.

So the policy discourses which overlook intersectionality as a framework are therefore unable to understand the particularities of the ways in which black women have experience subordination and exploitation. Anti-discrimination laws were routinely formed on the basis of a single axis analysis of discrimination and therefore they prove to be inadequate and their limitations are based on normative understanding of discrimination, which is not informed by intersectionality. As a result, their scope in terms of remedy has proved to be inadequate. Being a legal expert Crenshaw has analyzed court cases to show how black women were treated under the anti-discrimination law.

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- Crenshaw analyses court cases to show how Black women are treated in antidiscrimination law: Black women's claims were rejected and their experiences obscured because the court refused to acknowledge that the employment experience of Black women can be distinct from that of white women
- The interests of Black women were harmed because Black women's claims were viewed as so distinct from the claims of either white women or Black men that the court denied to Black females representation of the larger class
- Black women face discrimination in ways that are both analogous to and dissimilar from the ways white women and Black men experience them

She had seen how the cases of black women and how their claims were rejected and their experiences were obscured because the court refused to acknowledge that the employment experiences of women of colour can be distant from those of white women. And therefore the particular type of discrimination which a women of colour has to face during her employment or during her own personal life are always equated with that of the white women.

So the interest of black women were harmed because their claims were viewed as being so distinct from the claims of either black men or white women. So we would find that it was the understanding of exploitation from the perspective of a black men which was always upheld in the case of black women and therefore they had to suffer marginalisation.

Similarly, their own experiences related with women hood were always compared with experiences of a white woman and therefore they were always pushed in the background because the court was not able to understand how their experiences can be so different because the court took the experiences of a black men and that of a white woman as being the normative ones.

So black women had to face discrimination in ways that are both analogous to and dissimilar from the ways white women and black men experience them.

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- Critiques Feminist theory as incapable of fully representing the experiences of black women.
- White feminists speak for all women and as a representative of all women.
 - Tend to ignore the element of race in their analysis of patriarchy and sexuality
 - Erases the specificity of black women.
 - White superiority mitigates some aspects of sexism as white-middle class women are more privileged.
 - Ignore how women's race and class privilege is complicit in the domination of women of color

Crenshaw has also criticized the feminist theory as being incapable of fully representing the experiences of black women and we have already seen how certain trends within the feminist theory have already highlighted this aspect. The idea that the white feminist word can be taken as a representative one for all women has already been rejected by the postmodernist thought and we find that the intersectionality debate started and initiated by Crenshaw has also taken up again with an emphasis.

So according to Crenshaw the normal feminist debates erase the specificity of the experiences of black women. White superiority mitigates some aspects of sexism as white middle class women are automatically more privileged. So white feminist ignore how women's race and class privilege is complicit in the domination of women of colour by a different race or by men of their own race.

These initial arguments of Crenshaw were further reinforced and enhanced in another essay which was published by her in 1991.

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Crenshaw's 1991 essay

- "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color"
- Crenshaw furthers the question of intersectionality by framing it within the twin context of traditional identity politics and the issue of violence against women of color.
- Comments on the ways in which violence shapes the lives of women
 - The everydayness of violence
 - The demand to end violence through political organization
 - The recognition of the systemic and structural aspect of violence as a weapon of patriarchal and racial terror to subordinate women

The title of this essay is "Mapping the Margins, Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color". So, in this essay we find that Crenshaw had furthered the question of intersectionality and has framed it within the twin context of traditional identity politics and the issue of violence against women of colour. She has commented on the ways in which violence has shaped the lives of women of colour particularly. And she has taken up certain perspectives, she has talked about the everydayness of violence which women have to face and she has also demanded to end violence through political organisation of women. She has also recognised the systematic and structural aspect of violence as a weapon of patriarchal and racial terror to subordinate women.

It was this particular trend which was later on talked about by various other philosophers, taking up the background of Crenshaw's articles and they had also started to talk about how during every war violence against women is always used as a way to silence in different ethnic group. So, you would find that Crenshaw's contributions in her initial article as well as in her 1991 article have been very significant to our understanding of the intersections of race, gender and other issues.

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- For example, battering and rape, once seen as private (family matters) and aberrational (errant sexual aggression), are now largely recognized as part of a broad-scale system of domination that affects women as a class
- The shift: From private/familial and isolated acts of aggression, violence against women is recognized as a social and systematic approach to silence women.
- This recognition of violence as social and systemic has been central to the identity politics of African-Americans, women of color, LGBT community and other dispossessed Ethnic groups and minorities

She has said that battering and rape which was earlier seen as private family matter and aberrational (sexual aggregation) are now largely recognized as part of a broad scale system of domination that affects women as a class. The shift from private or familial and isolated acts of aggression, violence against women is recognised as a social and systematic approach to silence women has been a major step as far as understanding the nature of violence against women of colour is concerned.

The recognition of violence against women as social and systematic has been central to the identity politics of African Americans, women of colour, LGBT community, and other dispossessed ethnic groups and minorities.

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- Main argument: To delineate the particularities of the location of the telling of the experiences of women of color who experience violence, by exploring the multidimensionality of their racial and gendered positions.
- Women of color marginalized within contemporary race and feminist theory
- Intersectionality as a paradigm to fill these gaps within race theory and feminism
- The essay focuses on the male dimension of violence against women of color in the form of rape and battering to suggest that black women's experiences can only be understood at the intersection of categories of race and gender.

The main argument of Crenshaw can also be summed up in a way that to delineate the particularities of the location of the telling of the experiences of women of colour who experience violence by exploring the multidimensionality of their racial and gendered positions. Women of colour are marginalized within contemporary race and feminist theory. So intersectionality has been developed as a paradigm to fill these gaps within race theory and feminism.

So, Crenshaw's 1991 essay has focused on the male dimension of violence against women of colour in the form of rape and battering and has suggested that black women's experiences can only be understood at the intersection of categories of race and gender and not in isolation. We can also say that this strand of theory deconstructed the essentialism which underpinned the notion of women as an universal category in feminism. It has been driven by activism and has critically looked at the previous theorists talking about feminism and race issues. She has also explored the ways in which race and gender intersect in order to shape the structural and representational aspects of violence against women. Though we can also say that Crenshaw does not offer intersectionality as a new theory of identity rather she has offered it as a corrective approach to question the limitations of contemporary theories of race and gender.

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- Driven by activism and critical outlook, this strand of theory deconstructed the essentialism which underpinned the notion of 'women' as a 'universal' category in feminism.
 - Explores the ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, and representational aspects of violence against women
- Doesn't offer intersectionality as a new theory of identity.
 - Offers a corrective approach to question the limitations of contemporary theories of race and gender
 - There are other factors such as class, sexuality and ethnicity that equally affect and modulate the experiences of individuals.
- Postmodernist rebuttal of certain concepts used by race/gender theorists; such as experience, standpoint and identity politics

So and it is in this context that her contribution has to be understood. There are other factors such as class, sexuality and ethnicity that equally affect and modulate the experiences of individuals and postmodernist rebuttal of certain concepts used by race and gender theory such as experience, standpoint and identity politics has also been taken up by Crenshaw.

So we can say that instead of suggesting a new theory altogether Crenshaw has given a corrective approach to an already existing idea and she has given us a particular name to label a trend which was important to understand how these institutions work in tandem to reinforce each other.

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Division of issues into Three categories

- Structural intersectionality: How the experience of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform are qualitatively different for women of color in comparison to that of white women
- Political intersectionality: Explores how both feminist and antiracist policy discourses have, paradoxically, marginalized the issue of violence in the context of women of color
- Representational intersectionality: The process of cultural construction of women of color, especially in popular culture, obscures the actual real-life experiences

The issues of intersectionality can be divided into three categories as Crenshaw has suggested, the **structural**, **political** and **representational intersectionality**. **Structural intersectionality** is related with the way the experience of domestic violence occurs in the context of women of colour. How rape and remedial reform are qualitatively different for these women in comparison to the experiences of the white women.

Political intersectionality explores how both feminist and antiracist policy discourses have, paradoxically, marginalized the issue of violence in the context of women of colour. **Representational intersectionality** talks about how the cultural construction of women of colour particularly in popular culture has obscured the actual experiences, the real life experiences of women of colour presenting them only in certain stereotypes in consonance with the demands of a racist in patriarchal society.

The word intersectionality is also open to different connotations and we can look at certain different interpretations, which are currently important for us to understand.

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Different Interpretations of Intersectionality

- Crossroads (Crenshaw, 1991)
 - A repudiation of essentialist and simplistic notions of identity politics
 - Explores the effects and repercussions of the intersectional approach within contemporary identity politics
- A dynamic process (Dorthe Staunæs, 2003)
 - Process to identify positioning of people as troublesome to retool the concept in terms of lived experience
- 'Axes' of difference: race, gender, class, ethnicity (Yuval-Davis, 2006).
 - The ontological bases of different analytical levels at which social divisions can be studied
 - To work out specific intersectional methodological approach for engaging in human rights activities

Crenshaw has looked at the idea of intersectionality as something which is being on a crossroads of race and gender. She is a repudiation of essentialist and simplistic notion of identity politics and has explored the effects and repercussions of the intersectional approach within contemporary identity politics. Dorthe Staunæs in the article published in 2003 has looked at as a dynamic process and has talked about in collaboration with the subjectification process and has attempted to identify how these two trends: intersectionality and subjectification process, can be joined together to identify positioning of people as troublesome in order to retool the concepts in the context of lived experiences.

Yuval-Davis in the work published in 2006 has looked at axes of difference and has talked majorly about ethnicity. Yuval-Davis talked about the ontological basis of different analytical levels at which social divisions can be studied and how to work out a specific intersectional methodological approach for engaging in human right activities. She has talked about the ethnicity and how women and other minorities belonging to different ethnicities have to suffer. So you would find that this debate of intersectionality which was started by Crenshaw has developed and has become more encompassing.

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Three approaches in Intersectionality

- In her essay, “The complexity of Intersectionality”, Leslie McCall meditates on the efficacy of intersectionality as a theoretical and research paradigm.
 - Deals with complex strands within intersectional methodological approaches
 - Identifies three major approaches in terms of their relation to social categories of identity and location
 - Remains attentive of avoiding broad generalizations and accepts that in social research, these approaches often work in tandem with each other
 - Not separate or watertight compartmentalized approaches

The three approaches to intersectionality have been suggested by Leslie McCall in her essay “The Complexity of Intersectionality” in which she meditates on the efficacy of intersectionality as a theoretical and research paradigm. She has discussed the complex strands which exist within intersectional methodological approaches and has identified three major approaches in terms of the relation to social categories of identity and location. The **anti-categorical approach**, the **intra-categorical approach** and **inter-categorical approach** have been suggested by Leslie McCall. She still remains attentive of avoiding broad generalisation and accepts that in social research these three approaches often work together in cooperation and they cannot be separated into watertight compartmentalization. Now let us look at these three approaches.

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1. Anticategorical Complexity

- Based on a methodological approach which is skeptical of analytical categories and deconstructs them
- Owes its inception to the rise and development of poststructuralist, postmodernist and deconstructive thought
- Based on the destabilization of master/meta narratives.
- Important precursors: Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, Butler, Black feminists
- Evolution of Gender and Women’s Studies because of critical interventions of these postmodern and poststructuralist theorists

The **anti-categorical complexity** owes its inception to the rise and development of the poststructuralist, postmodernist and deconstructive thought. It is based on the methodological approach which is sceptical of analytical categories and deconstructs them in a way it also disowns them. It is based on the idea that metanarratives or the master narratives have to be destabilized and has been influenced by the postmodernist thinkers like Foucault, Derrida, Baudrillard, and Butler etc.

So we find that the evolution of gender theories and women's studies has been significant to give a particular shape to our understanding of anti-categorical complexity.

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- "Social life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences. Of the three approaches, this approach appears to have been the most successful in satisfying the demand for complexity, judging by the fact that there is now great skepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything but a simplistic way". (McCall, 2005)

And I quote from McCall, so you would find that this quote very clearly explains her ideas. "Social life", according to her, "is considered too irreducibly complex overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures to make fixed categories anything, but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences". So we find that she has termed that these categories are only simplified social fictions and in themselves they also generate hierarchies. She further says, "of the three approaches, this approach appears to have been the most successful one in satisfying the demand for complexity, judging by the fact that there is now great scepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything, but a simplistic way".

So we find that in anti-categorical approach there is a denial to accept these categories as anything, but simplified social fictions which in themselves also promote a hierarchical understanding and therefore we should not accept them.

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2. Intracategorical Complexity

- Intracategorical complexity initiated the study of intersectionality.
- Conceptually, it lies in the middle of the field/continuum between the anticategorical approach (which rejects categories) and the third approach, called intercategory approach (which uses analytic categories strategically)
- Like anticategorical approach, it questions the “boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself, though that is not its *raison d’être*”
- Like intercategory approach, it accepts the stability and even durability of social categories and their interrelationships, but it simultaneously, retains a critical perspective toward such categories.

The next approach talks about **intra-categorical complexities**. It is initiated as the first step to our understanding of intersectionality. In fact, conceptually it lies in the middle of the field, it lies somewhere between the anti-categorical approach which rejects all categories and the approach which is termed as inter-categorical and which uses analytical categories in a strategic fashion. Like anti-categorical approach it questions the boundary making and boundary-defining process itself and thinks that there is no reason for accepting them. However, like inter-categorical approach it also accepts stability and even durability of social categories and their interrelationships, but it also simultaneously retains a critical perspective towards such categories.

So we find that the intra-categorical complexity and approach accepts that there is certain durability, certain stability as far as these categories are concerned and therefore they can be used in a strategic fashion.

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Intercategorical Complexity

- Lesser known of the three approaches
- Begins with the recognition that social categories give rise to hierarchical relations of power and domination and individuals are enmeshed in these unequal social relations
- Involves the provisional and strategic acceptance of existing social and analytic categories to analyze relationships of inequality, discrimination and exploitation among diverse social communities/groups.
- They also document the configuration and reconfiguration of inequalities along multifarious and often contradictory dimensions

Inter-categorical approach is the least known approach of intersectional theories. It begins with the recognition that social categories give rise to hierarchical relations of power and domination and individuals are enmeshed in these unequal social relations. It also involves the provisional and strategic acceptance of existing socio-analytical categories to look at the relationships of inequality, discrimination and exploitation among diverse social communities and groups.

These philosophers who suggest this approach also document the configuration and reconfiguration of inequalities along multifarious and often contradictory dimensions.

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- “The [inter]categorical approach focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and not on complexities within single social groups, single categories, or both. The subject is multigroup, and the method is systematically comparative”. (McCall, 2005)

And I quote again from McCall the inter-categorical approach focuses on “The complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and not on

complexities within single social group, single categories, or both”. So the subject according to her is ‘multigroup’. It is not a single group, but the subject in the focus is always on the multigroup and the method is ‘systematically comparative’.

Now we would find that the debate of intersectionality is significant in order to understand the ways in which the codes of culture, race and gender intersect, they reinforce each other and they cannot be interpreted in isolation. And therefore we would find that they have been on the forefront of various phenomena. They have initiated changes in the way the society understands these issues, they have also initiated certain changes in the way the laws are being constructed and the policies are being framed. And at the same time we would find that this debate enables us to understand a particular literary representation which is also a cultural product in a very comprehensive manner.

So in order to look at the analysis of a particular piece of literature I have taken up as an illustration a poem “Still I Rise” by the famous African American poet Maya Angelou.

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- “Still I Rise,” by the African American poet Maya Angelou (1928), offers an intriguing mixture of tones
- It is playful and defiant, comical and angry, self-assured and bitter.
- Ultimately, however, the poem’s tone, as the work’s title suggests, is triumphant.
- Voice against oppression and racism
- Feminist, also a universal voice

And we find that a study of this poem offers an intriguing mixture of intersectionality tones. It can be a playful and defiant, comical and angry tone, self-assured and bitter, but at the same time you would find that this is a voice against operation and racism. It is an anti-racist poem and it is also a very feminist poem. This is a poem which we cannot understand fully if you look at it only from a feminist perspective or only from racial perspective. So this poem has to be understood simultaneously from different angles.

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Maya Angelou (Marguerite Annie Johnson) (1928 – 2014)

- Published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, and several books of poetry
- Credited with a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years
- Received dozens of awards and more than 50 honorary degrees
- Angelou is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on her childhood and early adult experiences.
 - The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), tells of her life up to the age of 17 and brought her international recognition and acclaim.
- She is respected as a spokesperson for black people and women, and her works have been considered a defense of Black culture.

Maya Angelou is the famous American author, poet and civil right activist, who has published seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry and has been credited with a list of plays, movies, TV shows spanning over fifty years. She has received dozens of awards and more than fifty honorary degrees. So she is best known for her series of seven autobiographies, which focus on a childhood and early adulthood experience.

The first, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, published in 1969 tells of her life up to the age of 17 years and it brought her International recognition and acclaim. She is respected as a spokesperson for black people and also black women and her works have been considered as a difference of black culture.

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“Still I Rise”

- You may write me down in history
 - With your bitter, twisted lies,
 - You may trod me in the very dirt
 - But still, like dust, I'll rise.
- The poem is both highly political and highly personal. The speaker – a woman – is implicitly responding to decades and centuries of oppression and mistreatment.
 - Clearly addressed to the white oppressors of black persons, the poem presents us with a black woman willing to speak up for herself, for other living blacks, and even for her black ancestors
 - It is not simply a private meditation. Much of its energy derives from its bold and defiant self-assertiveness. Her tone never sounds arrogant or boastful. Instead, most readers are likely to feel immense sympathy with her spirited rejection of further oppression.

We find that in this poem she has started to talk about the blackness from within. She is not apologetic about her personality, about her experiences. So this poem is simultaneously highly political and highly personal. The speaker who is a woman questions the gendered operation and also she questions the wrong writing of experiences by the other people. It is clearly ostensibly addressed to the white oppressors of black persons. And you would find that it also presents to us the perspective of a black woman. So it is not simply a lyrical private meditation. So you would find that the energy of this poem has been drawn from the bold and defined self-assertions. The tone of the poet is never arrogant in a way even though she has used rather aggressive sounding verbal phrases, but you would find that the way these phrases have been structured within the poem. The reader feels immense sympathy immediately for her spirited rejection of exploitation which she had to go through not only as a woman, but also as a person belonging to a different race.

So this is a poem which is against the exploitation of a woman and exploitation of a woman of colour and also a poem which questions the racial apartheid and exploitation. In different stanzas of the poem we find that the togetherness of these two streams is very strongly presented.

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Does my sassiness upset you?
Why are you beset with gloom?
'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells
Pumping in my living room.
Just like moons and like suns,
With the certainty of tides,
Just like hopes springing high,
Still I'll rise.

- It seems to overcome sexism and the oppression of women in particular.
- a great symbolic challenge to the oppression of women, also to racism and policies of difference
- Though her oppressors might think they have ended her by subjecting her to poverty, still, she walks like she has all the wealth in the world.
- It's as though she knows her oppressors are so materialistic and mercenary, that the only way they can describe her joy and personality is to say she looks like she has a lot of money.

So you would find that when she talks about her sassiness she tries to interrogate the validity of various social assertions regarding wealth, regarding power, regarding sexuality. So you would find that this challenge is a challenge not only of a woman, but also a person who is representing a particular race.

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- You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.
- Does my sexiness upset you?
Does it come as a surprise
That I dance like I've got diamonds
At the meeting of my thighs?
- Direct exhortation
- It makes readers realize how many people have attempted to humiliate the poet – a Black woman
- Shows the inner grit as a woman and as a race
- Involves readers' sense of responsibility

And you would find that these trends, the simultaneity and the intertwining of these two tones continue throughout all these stanzas. There is a direct exhortation continually in which she is also trying to incorporate the reader sense of responsibility shows the inner grit as a woman and as a race and it makes readers realise how many people have attempted to humiliate the poet, the Black women, a woman who happens to be a Black and who is also trying to represent her race. So you would find that the connectivity of race and gender, the intersectionality of race and gender is very dominant in our understanding of this poem.

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- Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
- Comparing how she continuously raises herself up emotionally to stay strong – gender and race
- Angelou's message, which is to stay strong and to never allow anything or anyone stop you from fighting and living strong.
Pride in her race
- Assertiveness in her womanhood

So you would find that she has continually raised herself up emotionally to stay strong not only as a woman, but also as a representative of her race. So this poem continually shows a pride in her race as well as an assertiveness in her womanhood. So her message is to stay strong and to never allow anything or anyone to stop you from fighting and living strong.

So simultaneously it is a message of a woman who is trying to stay very strong against the sexual harassment, the sexual exploitation and at the same time it is a message to retain assertiveness as far as the racial pride is concerned.

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- I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
- Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.
- Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
- Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
- This may be referring to how her own life is, full of horrific and unexpected events.
- The black ocean may also describe her own race which allows readers to understand that the poem is about racism, as much as it is about gender.

So you would find that when she continually repeats this message, “I rise, I rise”. So this may be referring to how her own life is which is full of horrific and unexpected events and she is trying to rise despite these challenges. This is also an exhortation to womanhood in which she is extorting all women to stay strong and to rise despite all hardships and at the same time you would find that this is a message to her race in which she is asking the black people, people of African origin, African Americans to stay strong and to rise again.

When she presents different images the images of dust, so you would find that when we have to interpret this poem we have to take the help of the ideas of intersectionality. So we find that when continually Maya Angelou is asking us to take a stand and to rise, she is partially talking about her own life, she might be referring to her own life, which has been full of horrific and unexpected events. At the same time she might be exhorting to women asking them to rise despite their own gendered exploitation and at the same time this may be a message to her race in which she exhorts the people of her race to rise facing all the trauma which has been there lot for generations.

So you would find that this idea of intersectionality which was started by Crenshaw has been developed as a major critical tool to understand how a literary product can be interpreted in a way which fulfills our understanding in various ways.

The interpretation of this poem either from a feminist perspective or from the perspective of race theories would somehow be incomplete and therefore these debates of intersectionality are very important, we have to enrich our understanding of several literary pieces.

These debates would also be linked with the idea of postcolonial theories. So you would find that the issues of gender which had started to be talked about ultimately gave us in understanding of racial issues and then understanding of racial issues also made a sensitive to the plight of those people who had suffered colonialization. And you would find that there is an underlying thread of connectivity in these movements of protest; Protest against gender based isolation, protest against racial isolation and protest against isolation of those people who have been colonized.

So you would find that in this module we would continue our discussion of the postcolonial theory, thank you.