

Literary and Cultural Disability Studies: An Exploration
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Lecture – 19
Anjali: A Filmic Begin in Integration and Inclusion – Part 2

Welcome all. Welcome back to the second part of the lecture on Anjali. I call this second part ‘Anjali; a filmic begin in integration and inclusion’. Well to begin with there is no better place than education where Foucauldian frameworks are so relevant. Think for example our own situation. Whatever is the kind of education we envisage, that is the kind of people we will raise.

If we want our children to be smart then we will send them to schools that give a great skill set, survival techniques and so on and they become smart people. But if we want overall organic development, then we will send them to schools which just give that - moral education, artistic education, aesthetic education, skill sets and then sport and then education in care and so on.

You might call that kind of education, in that sense does not exist, it can at least be an aspiration. So learning environments shape people and they shape people through productive power and that is why I talked about this film as a statement on education, although schools are not directly involved. Church, family and the school, as they say, are integrated units. We cannot separate them.

I see this as a methodological problem in seeing things together. First, what kind of education am I talking about? I am talking here about special education because Anjali is mentally disabled, if you like. Maybe autistic, we still do not know but let us stick to the term ‘mentally disabled’ - some cognitive condition. For simplicity let us talk about special education in three means: segregated education, integrated education and inclusive education.

Segregated education is what I went to as a disabled child. I went to a school for the blind where all my peers were blind children; blindness of various categories, some had low vision, some

could not see at all and so on. Many of our teachers were also blind with some exception. There were sighted teachers too.

And the philosophy was when you have an exclusive attention say when children are given exclusive attention in learning certain skill sets, say learning math, learning braille, interpersonal skills, experience of tactile maps and so on you get the best of your childhood and you get exposed and you learn and you grow up as a fuller individual in a protective system. And then come out as it were into the main world beyond the four walls and then you enter the mainstream. So that was the philosophy in which I was educated. Segregated education can potentially identify problem with individual. They can also have what David Bolt calls 'assumed authority' on children with disabilities. Let me go a bit autobiographical today. I think that might help me to demonstrate the case.

Well in our school we were told that "you children can do humanities say Tamil literature, English literature and so on because they are verbal disciplines. All you need to do is get that stuff in your head through braille, say poetry, prose, names of places, maps and everything in your head. Once it goes into your head you have total authority on them. On the other hand, things like math, they require spatial understanding, science is all experiments and you cannot do that stuff."

Well, you know the consequence it had was the assumed authority in the ways we conceived of our future in fields such as humanities, social sciences and sciences. Me and my cohort, most of us chose humanities and social sciences. Only some chose social sciences because we were told field work-based disciplines may not be ideal for us because we cannot have authority over the field, and so it is not as simple as poetry where you can grab it into your memory as it is. So, most of us chose humanities for the same reason. So, segregated education can do that, but given the Indian situation most of my peers came from not too well-to-do families. They were from poor family backgrounds. This is the reality about disability in India, most of it is debilities

because poverty leads to disability and disability can lead to poverty because of lack of employment and so on.

So most of my peers came from poor families who cannot afford much. So in that sense special education settings like the one I went to offered segregated, specialist, exclusivist attention to pupils and thereby allowed everyone to grow up together on an equal footing in many ways. So there are justifications and denunciations both on the segregated education model. Well, these denunciations and justifications form much of the narratives of deinstitutionalization in disability studies narrative.

What am I saying? Well many people like me have gone to specialist settings where segregated education, learning and living and thriving happens but all the more important those places can be a place of abuse, human rights disregard, humiliation, torture and pain; many of them can be potential places for these. I am not talking about myself, but I am talking about many specialist institutions around the globe.

So people who experience that kind of human indignity, when they come out, they come up with narratives of deinstitutionalization. So that forms a significant form of disability studies scholarship where first-person narratives become prominent and important. For that matter most forms of identity based disciplines espouse that so importantly in our 21st century academic thinking.

But why did I bring this topic when the film does not involve segregated education? That is a good question you have in mind, this is the answer. Shekhar, Chitra are asked to come for an apartment meeting. They go there. I think you should watch that anecdote, it is very nice. What happened? There are elders, many family people and all.

So, they start a conversation, and say, "Shekhar, we want to say something". Shekhar says "hey look I am very busy I have three children". "Ha yes, yes, it is about your third child". "So what

about third? That is, look I do not have time say it straight”. “You know your child Anjali is a mental case and she can be in one of those places where this mentally children are”. And he gets angry, and he shows anger physically and behaviourally. Well he does not manhandle anyone, but shows it in his body language. Of course, Chitra is there to console him and Chitra suffers emotional things in her own terms. In the previous lecture I was referring to how fathers and mothers handle emotional burdens differently when they have disabled children. Of course, you can read more on that in literature created by Bhargavi Davar, Renu Addlakha and others.

Now coming to the problem. There is the advice given by the neighborhood about institution for the ‘mental case’ and the ‘mentally’ within quotes. They have in mind an institutional segregated setting where these kinds of children, these types of children are there or they are meant to be there and not amidst us. They are meant to be out of sight and out of mind. They are out there, no more near us, not even in the neighborhood, out there. That is the problem with segregated education.

So it not only leads to a punishment of a kind like imprisonment, it also creates social discourses, power imagination where segregation means that which is there and it is for that kind of people. This is the point I wanted to make here. In any event this movie came out in 1990 when there was some kind of buzz about the notion of integrated education which is what my next topic is.

The act for integrated education for disabled children came 5-6 years before the movie was released. According to integrated education, the philosophy of integrated education assumed that disabled children can be taken out of their segregated settings, at least smarter ones and they can be every now and then taken into mainstream schools or they can be educated in mainstream schools with some support through a resource center and so on.

So, it is not full inclusion but a foot here and a foot there, that kind of system. But integrated education also assumed (meaningfully and with all good intention) that integration happens first in the community before it happens in the realms of classroom. In that sense the philosophy of

integrated education was certainly profound. Community integration, does it happen automatically?

No. How can it? There needs to be community education first and even in that sense this film is a watershed. What kind of community education am I talking about or the film is talking about? Again, Foucauldian paradigm is very useful. Foucault is not interested in the scenario where I slap someone and exercise crude power. He is interested in the subtle ways in which people influence each other.

And that influence is part of a larger power structure that is in circulation even before they are aware of it; that is how we create docile bodies. So here, look at the apartment they have. They have elderly people who are disgruntled, they are abandoned by their family. There are women who are single, who are facing marital abuse. There are people who came out of prison. There are people who are experiencing domestic abuse and so on. So what is happening? There is a larger power structure that is influencing people in different ways to become one individual. Mind you, this was in the 1990s when nuclear families were developing and it was in the early stages of evolution and its consequent community formations in enclaves, and therefore integration of disabled children in the community will have that kind of angle about it.

So any form of community education will involve getting used to the idea of an apartment. A typical Indian middle class apartment will have children with varying capabilities and this capabilities will instill a different kind of body language, different kind of friendship and getting used to that idea, so in other words proper 'care ethics'. So in order to understand the movie's contribution to community education I am going to quickly make use of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's magisterial narrative on stares.

Well, I have already pointed out in one of my previous lectures the subtle difference between gaze and stare. Gaze is a disciplinary look like the medical gaze. For example medicine

authorizes doctors to examine our body; it is an authority. Similarly, English literature as a discipline puts us through some kind of disciplinary lenses that we are not aware of before.

So similarly here there is lot of community staring happening at this child. In that apartment meeting one woman says, “our child is imitating Anjali, ‘he’ ‘hu’ and sounds like that and we do not want our children to get that kind of language”. So, there are different kinds of stare going on. If not all, let me at least count a few of the stares that Rosemarie Garland-Thomson is talking about.

She talks about baroque stare, you know, like baroque art is full of color, pageantry and immense color outburst. Baroque music and baroque art was very popular in 18th century. Cathedrals built with baroque orientation will have immense painting and drawings on the roof that are extravagant declaring god's grandeur in that sense.

But here she talks about baroque staring in a different way. Baroque staring is kind of extravagant looking. For example it is entirely possible that a disabled person walks in an unexpected place, say a swimming pool, everybody turns their head, “my god! who is this person”. Somebody says, “wow” or somebody just refuses to do other things and keeps staring at that person without any pause. This is kind of what Thomson calls rogue looking.

So, it is possible that in this community apartment where different families live they are unable to move their stare away from the child and therefore making the child that is Anjali an object of immense baroque stare. Thomson talks about a stare that she calls separated stare. Well it is a kind of looking away that a disabled person may provoke depending on the person who is looking at the disabled. Some kind of fear, maybe anxiety, disgust, anything; it could be anything. So they can just look away, I do not want to look at this person. So basically a lot of people in the community wanted to look away from Anjali and her family. So what am I trying to say? A conversation of a kind that happens in the film demonstrates how power through looks, body language circulate through families and neighborhoods and how it can be reoriented. So

integration can happen only when communities are ready for integration. Just calling education settings as 'integrated education' is not going to work.

A third model of education which is now called inclusive education; it is a larger idea. Many millions of poor children do not have access to food, basic care, poverty prevents them from going to school and so on. So we have Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and other schemes that enable children to have primary education and so on. Inclusive education is a larger thing. It talks about access to education for all, creating a good ecosystem for people, children in poverty, children with a disability, children who are discriminated against by way of caste, language, color and whatnot.

So, Anjali is a beginner. The movie is a beginning moment in that sense, a public conversation about these forms of education. But certainly a filmic seed is laid there but our larger purpose is to understand the application of Foucauldian method to film analysis using notions such as governmentality, docility, power and discipline and so on for a disability analysis.

Well concluding remarks. In the previous lecture and now what I was trying to do was illustrate how governmentality can be used as a literary and filmic analytic method. Here, I analyzed Anjali to capture these moments of personal and community education and through that the notion of power. Anjali certainly reminds us that more work needs to be done and newer modalities of analysis need to be in place in the twenty-first century, thirty years after the film moment. Thank you.