

The Imperative for Disability Studies as an Independent Area of Enquiry in Indian Academia

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Abstract : The present paper explores the imperative to establish disability studies as an independent area of academic inquiry in India through the establishment of specific programmes in disability studies. The case study of the efforts made by the Ambedkar University, Delhi, to develop such programs and courses shall be used to substantiate this imperative as well as to explore some of the challenges entailed. The paper shall explore the certain extent aspects of relevant scholarship in the area of disability studies in India today and critically reflect on the perspectives of disability in this scholarship. The study of disability in India has hitherto been the prerogative of special education, rehabilitation psychology, and social work departments. While instances of these departments adopting critical approaches to disability can be identified, their empirical focus has perpetuated the production of disability as the site of suffering and oppression. The complex cultural, phenomenological, historical and economic discourses within which disability is embedded can be better captured within distinctive programmes that have disability sui generis as their focus. Such programs would foreground disability as an epistemology, which universalizes the study of disability from disabled people alone to an analysis of various other groups who have been historically marginalized. It will also play an important role in recuperating disability from a state of alterity. The interdisciplinary nature of disability studies offers an opportunity to integrate perspectives from the humanities and the social sciences in the proposed programs. Some of the challenges or rather aspects of reflection that emerge in the course of developing these programs are the criteria for determining the suitability of faculty to teach these programs and the challenges in identifying faculty and in addressing any apprehensions about career prospects that prospective students might have. The manner in which these concerns are being addressed through the collaboration of expertise as well as through the interdisciplinary and flexible nature of the program shall be addressed in the course of the paper. In conclusion, the paper shall foreground the need for disability studies programs in India, the re-appropriation of existing scholarship in the process of formulation these programs, emerging concerns and the manner in which these concerns will be addressed.

Keywords : academia, disability studies, epistemology, India

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