

**Literary and Cultural Disability Studies: An Exploration**  
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**Lecture – 29**  
**ISL Workshop Day 2 – Part 1**  
**Demonstration of the Working of ISL – Its Beauty and Diversity**

Hemachandran Karah: Good evening all of you. Today, we will focus on ISL. Well, talking about the beauty, sign language is as old as humanity, therefore it is natural that it is beautiful, magnificent and culturally diversified. So, what we do in the next one and a half hour is to understand ways in which we appreciate its beauty.

By no means we are going to say, this is a crash course, welcome all to sign language in an hour that is not what we are going to do. We are going to offer some frameworks, tools and methods by which we can see the beauty of sign language that is the goal today. As usual, please come up with great questions. We have a distinguished panel here. Nita and Gopalakrishnan sir were here yesterday and they will be there today. Shafique is here and Deepa Kiran well-known storyteller is with us. So, I hand over to Nita for further. Thank you.

Nita Gopalakrishnan: Thank you Dr. Hema. It is great to come back again today for the second day of this wonderful workshop. So yesterday we had Mr. Gopalakrishnan and we had Mr. Rahul, who shared their practical and lived experience of being deaf, sign language promoters and deaf leaders in the community. So today like we all know that our topic for discussion is beauty of sign language.

So, what better way to start this topic than to have a beautiful narration and expression through a story. Okay. So, we have with us a very dear friend and a wonderful storyteller Deepa Kiran today. So, I will give you a brief about all the distinguished work that she has done. So, she is an award-winning professional storyteller. She is a trainer and educationalist of international repute. She is also employing magical power of story arts and meaningful transformation. So, her dream is to offer heartfelt connections with conscious communication. So, with the beauty of storytelling, she brings stories and learning to so many children through her Story Arts Foundation. She has also given speeches and talks with TEDx. And she trains teachers on how to use the simple yet

effective technique for storytelling for teaching children. So, Deepa thank you very much to be part of us today.

Deepa Kiran: So, Hemachandran, delighted to see you Gopalakrishnan uncle, Rahul, Amaresh, and Mohammad Shafique sir all of you.

Nita Gopalakrishnan: Okay, so Deepa today we are having a story that we want to tell the audience but in a very different way, right. You are going to narrate this in the spoken language and I am going to simultaneously do it in sign language. Okay. Should we start Deepa?

Deepa Kiran: Oh yes, I just want to check is my audio clear?

Hemachandran Karah: Very clear.

Nita Gopalakrishnan: Okay. So just to tell the audience so you will be seeing me sign, you will hear Deepa's voice. So just enjoy it and have a great time

Deepa Kiran: Come, come, come everybody. Come, come, come everybody. Just for you I have a story. Come, come, come everybody, just for you I have a story. Sometimes nice, sometimes scary. Sometimes nice and sometimes scary, just for you I have a story. Come, come listen everybody. Come, come. Come, come everybody. Just for you I have a story.

So, welcome everyone. Welcome to the story. Now this story is a very long time ago. A time when the sea was not salty. Yes, there was a time when the sea was actually sweet in taste. Yeah. So, my story begins right that time when the sea was nice and sweet, there lived a wood cutter called Shanker. Chuck chaka; chuck chaka; chuck chaka; chuck chaka; chuck chaka; chuck chaka; chuck chaka; chuck. The wood cutter Shanker would chop the wood. He would go to the forest. He is with his axe. Collect all the wood in a bundle. Bring the bundle back his home and sell it in the market.

Yeah, but one day Shankar made a mistake. Came back home late in the evening; How foolish of me. Oh, I left my axe in the jungle, my nice beautiful new axe. What do I do? Should I go back in the dark? Should I forget about my axe? But some animal might take it. The monkey, bear might take away my axe. So, Shankar decided he will go back to the jungle in the dark. He folded his hands, started saying all the prayer. **(FL: From 08:48 to 08:54)** And he ran and ran and ran into the forest. And he found his axe. But it was dark that Shankar could not even see his hand in the dark. It was pitch dark. He did not know how to go home. So, he was walking around with this axe and suddenly fell

down into a hole and he landed in a cave. He tried to see in the dark. And in the cave, he saw dwarfs 6 short men dancing around a bonfire. These 6 men were singing and dancing. **(FL: From 10:18 to 10:25)** Yeah. So about 6 men dancing around **(FL: From 10:38 to 10:41)**. They were short men with long silver beards and long silver hair and they kept dancing around the bonfire **(FL: From 11:02 to 11:10)** and Shankar was watching. Their bonfire the flames were dying because the wood was getting burned.

When the flames became very small, all these people became sad. Now Shankar he quickly took his axe, found his way slightly outside the cave, he found a tree. He chopped some wood again, he brought it, bonfire again, the fire was big again. Once again, the dwarfs started dancing **(FL: From 12:33 to 12:42)** And all night this happened again and again. The flames will become small, the dwarfs will become sad. Shankar will go and chop some more wood. Light up the fire. Once again, they danced all night, again and again.

In the morning, the leader of the dwarf the old man he was very happy and he gave a gift. Shankar took it. Oh, what is this? He asked. It is a magical fan. If you swish it three times; 1, 2 and ask for whatever you want, you will get it. But once you get it, remember you must remember to close the fan and say thank you, enough. Shankar takes the fan and he went back running when the sun came up. He went home. In the house he was so hungry. He opened the fan and he swished it three times; 1, 2, 3. Can I have a plate of biryani please? Yeah, a plate of biryani appeared, yummy, tasty, hot, delicious. Shankar started eating. By then, one more plate of biryani appeared, one more plate of biryani appeared, one more plate of biryani appeared and he said what is this? Yeah, he had forgotten to close the fan, say thank you it is enough. So, Shankar closed the fan and said thank you.

Yes. Now Shankar thought if I have a little nice house to stay how good? So, he opened the fan 1, 2, 3. Can I have a nice house please? The house appeared and immediately Shankar closed the fan and said thank you that is enough. He was very happy in his new house. Now Shankar's neighbour he thought I am also a wood cutter, how come this fellow has such a big nice special house? I should find out the secret. So, Shankar's neighbor Kumarappa he went to Shankar's house. He knocked on the door. Yes, namaste. Hello, Shankar. You got some new house and lot properties, some money, something, very nice, very nice. Very good. **(FL)** Congratulations. Tell me, what is the

secret? And Shankar said when I had gone to the jungle and I lost my axe. I went back. I met these dwarfs. They gave me a fan. And if you move the fan three times 1, 2, 3 you can ask for whatever you want. And when; oh if you move it three times you get whatever you want is it? Oh, fantastic. Kumarappa interrupted Shankar. Very good, nice magic. You are keeping it carefully, no? You cannot trust all these fellows around you know? Yes. I have kept it under my bed in the bedroom Shankar said.

So, the next day what should happen? Kumarappa came stealthily at night into Shankar's house. Crawled under the bed and opened the locker and he took out the fan and he ran and ran all the way from this village far away, so far away, so far away that he reached his grandmother's village which was near the sea. So Kumarappa knew that he had traveled. Now he could rest a bit. Just then, he saw people leaving that was so nice, pleasant bidding goodbye. People were going to set sail in the ship to Burma. And Kumarappa thought, I will escape with the fan to another country altogether and he also make it into the ship. This is only for merchants. Merchant, are you a trader? They asked Kumarappa. Yeah. I am trader. Yes. Is it? Then what do you sell? I am I sell salt; I am a salt trader. Yeah, salt. Alright, then, you can buy your ticket. So, he bought his ticket into the ship and happily sailed off to Burma.

When the ship was in the middle of the ocean, the captain called Kumarappa. See Mr. Kumarappa we have some problem here, you can help us. Is it, I can help? What is it please tell me. You see we have run out of salt in our kitchen. Our chef needs some salt and we heard that you are a salt trader. So could you please lend us some salt or we could buy the salt from you. Yes, sir. No problem, Kumarappa said. He ran into his room. Where will you get, you liar, why did you tell lies and get into the ship? He was cursing himself. And then he noticed his fan. Kumarappa opened the fan; 1, 2, 3 times he swished it and he said can I have a bag of salt please? A bag of salt. He went and handed it over to the captain of the ship. Here is your bag of salt sir. But by the time he came back in his cabin, it was full of salt bags.

So, the entire ship started filled with bags and the bags started pouring and pouring and Kumarappa was saying stop, enough. Stop, I told you know listen to me. He said everything except thank you that is enough. And that is how the salt bags started pouring and pouring into the ocean. So much salt in the ocean, Finally, somebody informed the dwarfs about it they pulled out the magic from the fan. But it was too late, lot have fallen

into the sea that the sea become salty. So that is the story of how the sea became salty. So, the next time you go to the store, do remember to look out for the magic fan. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you and great.

Nita Gopalakrishnan: Thank you so much Deepa.

Hemachandran Karah: Deepa where is that store, I have to buy the fan.

Deepa Kiran: It is not for greedy people

Nita Gopalakrishnan: So now, we know why the sea is salty. Okay, so you all must have seen how a story as enjoyable as this can also be, enjoyed by deaf people through sign language. So, I will now ask Mr. Gopalakrishnan to take us through a bit of history of sign language just to let us know what sign languages is and its beauty. So, I have a presentation which I will just share.

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## What is sign language

- Visual mode of communication
- Preferred as native language of the deaf
- Used even before spoken language started with humans.
- Use of hands, body & facial expressions to communicate information.
- Has it's own grammar

Gopalakrishnan Venkatraman: So, I am very happy to be here for the second session. And we heard Ms. Deepa Kiran story, very beautiful story, we can all understand what it was. So now, let us talk about sign language. Sign Language as you know is a visual language used for communication. For people who cannot hear it is very difficult for them to understand speech and that is the reason they have invented something called sign language. For example, there are different signs, sign for the word train can be assigned in different ways. And now we have the metro rail. So, in earlier days we did not have the metro rail or the electric engine train or something like that, we have the steam engine. But right now, we have the metro rail and everything. So, things are changing and similarly the signs also change. So, it is more visual.

And similarly for TV, for the television, so olden time we used to have the dial to change channels, but now we can use the remote control to change channels. So, when I sign like this, that means it is a remote control. It could be a remote control for the TV or for games or for car anything like that.

So, as you know that sign language is the native language of the deaf people. So, when a child is born, he acquires the language from a mother and the father, from the parents. So, for deaf children for them to acquire language it is better for them to learn sign language because it is very natural. So, a newborn baby does not know how to speak immediately. So, it has to acquire speech, it has to understand, it has to learn sounds from its environment and then start speaking.

And also, when we sign, we need a lot of facial expressions. Without facial expression, it is very difficult to understand what the word is. So, if you are happy, then you have a raised eyebrow. If you are sad, you have a lower eyebrow. If you are angry then your eyes are popping out or something like that. So different kinds of expressions. So, if a person is angry, so how do we know that a person is angry. So, usually what happens is the person who is angry his voice becomes very loud, his speech is very loud and all that so we can understand the person is angry. So, for a deaf person, he needs to see the expressions on the face and how the body is reacting so to understand if the person is angry.

And even if you want to specify the time, for example the past tense or future tense even that can be done through sign language. And in English, we have certain grammar words like on, of, is; so, these words we do not have it in sign language. Sign language also includes body movements. So, when we sign for example when we sign for the word train or when we sign for the elephant, you sign like showing a door is opening so including the hands, including the facial expressions, we also have the body movements. So, all these put together makes a beautiful sign language.

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## Myths about sign language

- Deafness is due to 'paap' or 'karma'! – NO!
- Sign language is universal – NO! there are dialects and variations.
- All deaf can lip read – NO! though they can attempt, it is highly mistake prone.
- Speak loudly so that they can listen! – NO!
- Speak slowly & they can understand! – NO!
- Using sign language will curb use of speech! - NO!
- Signs for new words are created by the hearing people! – NO!
- For words that don't have signs, we can use signs of other countries! – NO! Signs may be borrowed, but attempt to create own local signs

Rahul Jain: Hi everyone. So, right now we are going to talk about some of the misconceptions that people have with regard to sign language. The first thing is when a deaf child is born, so they think that it is because of some previous sin that has been committed in the previous birth and this is being related to that. So, it is nothing connected with that at all, so please do not have this misconception that if a deaf child is born so it is related to the past life and something like that. So, it is all connected to the genes. It is some kind of defect in the genes or probably some kind of physical defect of the body. So that is the reason a child is born deaf. Please do not have the superstition that child that is born deaf is related to the past birth.

Another misconception is that people think sign language is the same throughout the world that is not correct. So, each and every country has their own sign language just like how we have spoken languages here in India we have, in France they speak French. So, each country has their own languages and similarly they also have their own set of sign languages. So in India, we have Indian sign language. I hope that is clear.

The third one is all deaf people can speak fluently like a hearing person that is completely wrong. It is not very easy for a deaf person to speak as fluently as the hearing person. So, they might be able to pronounce some of the words correctly, but they cannot be as fluent speakers as a hearing person.

The other misconception is, to gain the attention of a deaf person, you will have to shout to get attention of a deaf person, this is completely wrong. There might be some of them,

may be some of those who are getting hearing aids or they have cochlear implants they might be able to hear this shout. So, in order to get the attention of a deaf person what you could do is you can either tap on his shoulder or if he is some distance away then you can either bang on the table so that they can feel the vibration. Deaf people are able to feel some vibration. So, if you shout at them, it is definitely not going to be useful. And some of them think that you have to speak very slowly to a deaf person so that they can understand. It really does not. No, that is completely not correct. It is okay if you speak normally, there is no need for you to speak very slowly. They might get confused if you speak very slowly. So, if you want to speak to them, you can speak to them in a normal tone.

Next, people think that if deaf people heard speech or go for speech therapy right from childhood and later on learn sign language, people claim that sign language will hinder or hamper the speech that is completely not true. Sign language does not hamper speech. So, in fact for example if an Indian person who speaks Hindi goes to another country and then there, they have a different language. If other person goes over there, he learns that language, acquires a language of a different country and he comes back to India. So, he has a knowledge of both languages, one can use both languages anytime he wants. So, similarly sign language is also a language that you can acquire but that definitely does not hamper or stop the speech of a deaf person.

The next one is, there is a misconception that the signs that are used in sign language, the different signs are invented by hearing people that is completely wrong. The sign language is a natural language which has been evolved from deaf people the way they communicate and everything. So, it is all evolved from deaf people because deaf people needed a way to communicate with each other so they have a communication system. So the sign language has evolved from them.

There is also another misconception that some countries borrow sign language or some of the vocabularies from other sign languages that is also not true. Each and every country has their own sign language and own vocabulary. In case a country does not have a particular sign language, does not have a sign vocabulary for a particular word, they might borrow it from other sign languages. In case in future, there is a new vocabulary or sign vocabulary invented for that particular word, then the sign which has



been borrowed from other languages are not used anymore. So that is how language develops. So, these are some of the misconceptions about sign languages. Thank you.

Nita Gopalakrishnan: Thank you, Rahul.