What is Digital Humanities - A Reflective Blog

The trek of learning about - Digital Humanities began almost 2 weeks ago. From the base camp of ambiguity to the summit of clarity has been an exhilarating experience. The fun will likely amplify as we tread ahead in the coming weeks. This mini blog is a snapshot of what I understand of Digital Humanities or humanities itself to start with.

It’s always great to brush up on the basics before diving into something new. *To understand humanities, it’s crucial to have a fair idea of Social Sciences too.* While the two streams may seem to be overlapping, there’s a fine line that differentiates both. To give a one-line explanation - **Human experience, culture, and expression in context to varying periods is humanities while society, social structure and human behaviour towards them consists of social sciences.**

****

To simplify it further, the social sciences observe and record while the humanities speculate, interprets and then record. It focuses on critical analysis and critical thinking as its primary tools to evaluate the available resources and delves into the intricacies of human experiences. It primarily teaches the pupils to question the existing phenomena(s), contemplate the pieces of evidence and then engage in a holistic discussion. But if we keep the intro deck aside, there’s a question that pops up in the mind and that is - **Why do we need Humanities? Just to document the past?**

One of the probable answers to the query is the humanities is a lot more than just an archive. *As it decodes the lived years in the most lucid way possible it carves avenues for people to understand the complex nuances of humankind*. For example: The structure of letters in Central India and Southern region is curvy while English and Greek letters are sharp and angular. The difference between these two writing styles is not a mere coincidence but something very interesting lies beneath. English and Greek letters used to be carved on stones and it was easy to draw straight lines rather than curvy figures. While here in India, the palm leaves were boiled and then dried to be prepped for manuscript writing. As angular letters could rip off the leaves, so Indians used curvy letters. This is why scripts like Odia, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Devnagiri are curvy in shape in comparison to their European and Mediterranean counterparts.



*(Source: Wikipedia)*

The aforementioned example is in respect to the language and literature perspective but while reading philosophy one can also understand the various psychological mechanisms of people. Why do people behave differently in a similar given situation? What activates their flight and fight responses? Adding more to it, how civilization rose to power, flourished and then declined are the questions that can be answered via the lens of humanities.

*Now let’s quickly glance through something new and more interesting.*

Adding a touch of modernity to humanities is the arena of digital humanities. While humanities use critical interpretation, textual analysis, and philosophical inquiry; digital humanities uses text mining, data visualization, and GIS mapping as its methodological tool. It transforms and enhances humanities research using digital methods, making it more interactive, scalable and accessible.

As the classes will roll, we’ll get more on to this. Let’s fasten our seatbelts for an exciting ride ahead. :)

Neha Yeshvi

MA240011