A Reflective Essay on IDH Classes

Embarking on my journey as a Research scholar in the area of Digital Humanities, I eagerly looked forward to the Introduction to Digital Humanities Class taught by our Professor, Dr Shanmugpriya who is herself one of the pioneers in DH, from India. Professor Shanmu, started the class by discussing what Humanities is, using the digital medium, a powerpoint presentation which included graphics and hyperlinks, making it a totally digital experience of studying Humanities.

Digital Humanities, as the name suggests is an interdisciplinary approach to studying Humanities via Digital tools. This combination of Humanities and Digital Technology fascinates me, as it challenges the notion that they lie on two extreme ends of the spectrum. During the discussion on the History of Humanities, I realized how the Digital Revolution in the present age is a Renaissance like event that has evolved the ways in which we can study Humanities. Just as the Renaissance transformed the discipline of Humanities making it secular and inclusive from its previous status of being more religious and orthodox, similarly the Digital Revolution has been transforming the way we have been studying and engaging with Humanities. For instance, DH enables scholars to study vast sets of data or texts, using several digital tools which would otherwise have been very cumbersome, had it been done, in the traditional way.

While learning to annotate articles on the web using hypothesis.is in the class, it really made me think how DH evolved the way of studying Humanities. Before the Digital Revolution, it was a common practice to annotate novels, putting star marks and writing over the edges in hardcover books and leaving one’s imprint on its pages. Using digital tools like’ hypothesis.is’ evoked a similar experience while reading an article on my laptop.Similarly, annotating videos using the VideoAnt tool,evoked memories of annotating on paperbacks, and I found it to be just as much a satisfying experience, rather an upgraded version of what I used to have while highlighting and writing my interpretations while reading my favorite poetry or novels.

The Introductory classes to IDH were thoroughly enjoyable with our Professor showing us an image of the Heritage building situated at our campus at ISM Dhanbad, asking us to critically analyze and share our interpretations. It was truly an example of the coming together of the Digital medium and Humanities, wherein one of the core ideas of Humanities which is critical thinking was fostered using the digital media, for instance an image of the Heritage building. This very assignment of writing a 500 word blog is another interesting example of studying humanities, digitally, making it an enjoyable experience of studying DH.

My take on the introductory classes on DH and my understanding of this course is that DH is the way of studying Humanities using digital or computational tools. While I get intrigued by questions like ‘Can machines think?’, ‘ Is technology a foe or friend to Humanities ?’. I am excited to delve deeper into this journey during the course of my Phd, in which I shall seek answers to more of such questions. For me, Digital Humanities is a very fascinating field of study and there is so much to learn that I look forward to in the upcoming classes.