

Contemporary Literature
Prof. Aysha
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Module No. # 01

Lecture No. # 07

Six degrees of separation contd...

Six degrees of separation we continue from page 75. If you remember, what we were talking about the last time, there is a confrontation between children of these rich people and their parents. So, we have a Doug who is the child of doctor fine and then we have a kitty and larkin, we (()) this is and their children. And then we have Tess and Woody Kittredges and if the commotion is all over about the identity of this so called Paul Poitier. So, the guy who goes around calming to be the son of Sydney Poitier.

Now, if you remember where we stop last time, page 75. The parents leave speechless defeated, the kids look through the high school yearbooks, a Tess spots a face. This is the point you know the departure of parents and we also see that is, it is not just the parents are not just concerned about the identity of this Paul, who has been coming to their homes and identifying himself as the son of Sydney Poitier. But there is also a deep disconnect between the parents and their own children, so, through Paul; no sorry, through Paul Poitier. Now, we also get a glimpse into the lives of these very rich people, who apparently have everything, but there is a still sense of dissatisfaction, there is a still a sense of alienation. And this is what where wants us to wander over. All the kids; sorry, Tess, Trent Conway, all the kids Trent Conway, Trent Conway appears Tess, Trent Conway look at those B D I's, staring out at me, Trent Conway, he is at M I T.

Now, and reference to one another very important very prestigious institute we have been talking about Harvard, we have been talking about other great institutes and now M I T. So, children of these very rich people, who go to M I T, who go to Harvard, who go to princeton, they talk about, they wear their money very lightly on this leaves the take pride in these prestigious institutes. But what are they getting out of it? That is what

where wants us to look at. Now, Trent Conway look at those B D I's staring out at me Trent Conway, he is at M I T. To us not Tess, look at us and says so, I went to M I T.

He was there in his computer room and I just praised him and praised him and praised him, I had a tape recorder is strapped to me. Now, tape recorder, this reference to tape recorder tied on once body, just does not remind you anything else?

(())

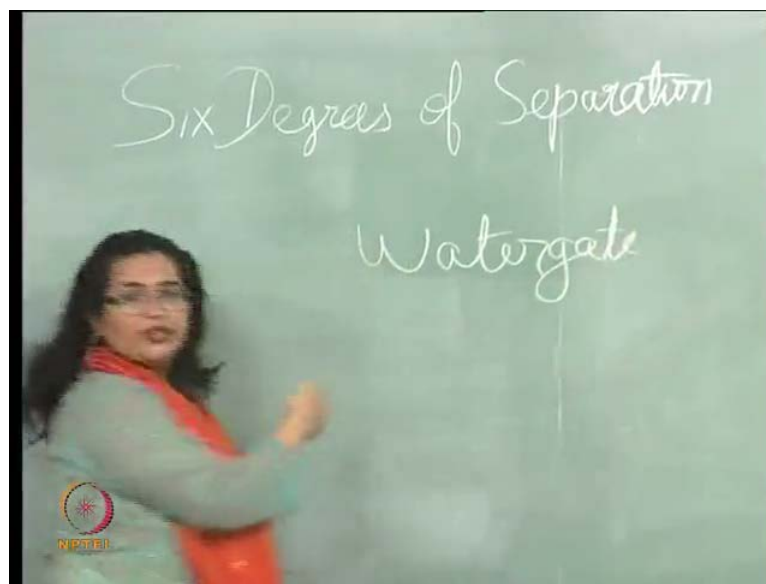
Yes, Abhay.

Is spying on someone, but I need political incident anything that you are familiar with, yes.

Water gate.

Water gate.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:36)



So, what happened during the water gate, we are talking about the Nixon period, when President Nixon was and it was believed that, Nixon was having the phones and the rooms of his political opponent stepped. So, this surveillance into; right into the, you know drawing rooms and into the very private spaces of people and this is against human rights. Today, now; the irony of this situation is that is Tess Kittredge.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:19)



Just a moment ago, she has been accusing her parents of as if you know the questioning her, as if they belong to K G B or McCarthy. K G B is the Russian.

(())

Spy system and McCarthy period of course, you know when everybody was under suspension, because of there so called communist tendencies. And the same Tess goes to her friends room with a tape; with a tape recorder type to her body, that do not you see the irony is there, the girl, who is so much for human rights, she go; she does not even trust her friend that much. She wants to put him on record. So, it is all about the hierocracy. Now, again the disconnect between friends. You do not like, you do not love your parents enough, you do not trust our friends enough. So, who do you like? Who do you connect with? That is the question.

Now, Trent's voice tape. This is also quite interesting dramatic strategy, where you do not find the conversation happening between Tess and Trent, but is the voices that, the record; the mechanical voices that you hear and what you hear? Yes I knew, Paul. Tess's voice tape, but what happen between you? Trent's voice tape, it was the lights come up slowly, Paul and Trent appear, rain, distant thunder, Jass playing somewhere off, Paul is dressed in jeans and that tang top high tops snicker. So, it is a flash back, within flash back strategy. So, Tess is recalling her confront or you know her meeting with Trent Conway and Trent Conway is recalling his encounter with Paul.

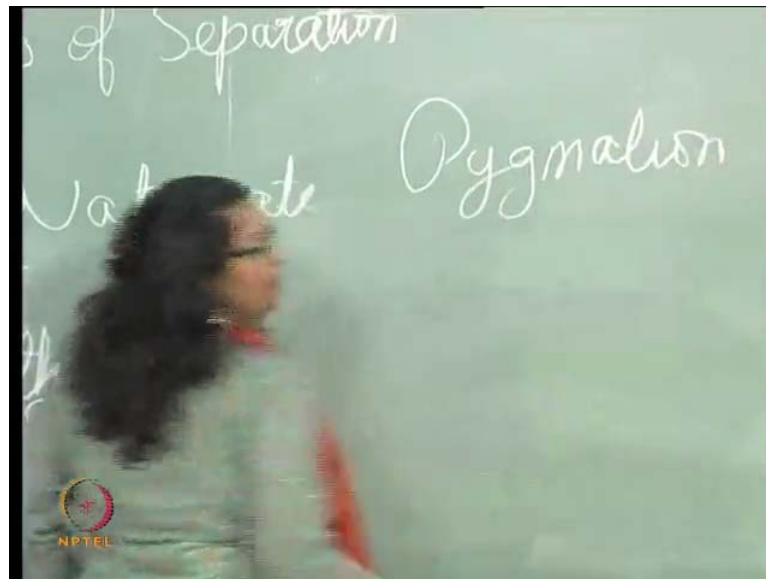
Trent: Now, this is very interesting, you pay attention to this. Trent is talking to or addressing Paul, this is the way you must speak, hear my accent, hear my voice. Never say you are going horseback riding, you say you are going riding and do not say couch, say sofa. And you say boddle, it is bottle, say bottle of beer. Now, does it remind your something? Paul says boddle of beer, Trent, bottle of beer. The some kind of echo something else that you have done.

Who did shocked? Did you? Who did shock for us? Yes do you remember?

(())

Pygmalion, ok, yeah.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:07)



What happens in Pygmalion? My fair lady Wright, but my fair lady is a movie based on Pygmalion a play by Shaw and what happens in that? Who is the Protagonist? He is the Phonetician, he is the Linguist, who is teaching a common flower girl, how to speak like a society lady. So that, she can pass off almost like a Dutchess or like a princess in a society of aristocrats. Do you remember the play or the movie, my fair lady? This is what, he is doing. So, it is if you remember, what were those famous sentences for that dialogue? How did he practice his speech? Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins in Pygmalion or in my fair lady.

(())

The rain in Spain falls mainly in the plain. How does she pronounce, the rine in spine cause mainly in the plines remember. The rain and when he says follow me, practice how I the way I speak, follow my accent, follow my pattern of speech, what are you trying to do here? What is the basic idea of Pygmalion? Which Guare is referencing?

(())

The social disconnect, there is you know there is something called speech. You know there are certain ways, if you learn your way to work around those problems those obstacles. Perhaps there is some kind of opportunity waiting for you at the end of the tunnel. So, if you practices speech, if you speak well, if you dress well, if you have the right kind of knowledge where you can you know, which you can feel confident to discuss among the very elitist kind of people. Then there are chances that you will be excepted as their own among those people. That is what Henry Higgins does in Pygmalion or my fair lady, that is what Trent Conway doing here to Paul so speech so do not you feel when he meets the Kittredges, he speaks beautifully.

He has lots of information, he is full of knowledge and that is what charms them. Boddle of beer, bottle of beer falls it in the sofa. He pulls out thick address book from under him, what is this? My address book, all these names, addresses. Tell me about these people now, here is the having this kind of address book, you know yellow pages and he wants access to all these people. Trent sits beside him, I want you to come to bed with me. Tell me about these people man, I just want to look at you. Paul is hypnotized by the address book, are these all rich people? No, hand to mouth on a higher Plato.

Now, the rich are rich like Geoffrey, they do not even carry money with them. He does not have two hundred dollars on his purse and to pay for the dinner, but he has two million dollars stashed away somewhere, those are the real rich. The real rich do not carry about hundred, two hundred dollars. The middle class rich are like the Kittredges, who depend on people like Geoffrey. So, even among the very rich there is kind of a hierarchy so, hand to mouth rich people. Rich, but you know not the real rich. I think it might be very hard to be with rich people, you have to have money, you have to give them presence that is what Paul thinks of the very rich people.

Not at all, rich people do something nice for you, you give them a pot of jam. Now pot of jam comes to so, remember when he sends a bouquet of flowers and a pot of jam, you

know thank you for a wonderful evening to who is that, that is what, pots of jam offer orange grape fruit. These are all varieties of jam strawberry, but fancy they have entire stores filled with fancy pots of jam rapped in cloth English or French. So, not just ordinary jam which are available to all mediocre or middle class people, but exotic varieties of jam and that is what, you should be sending them.

I will tell what I will do, I pick a name, you tell me about them where they live, secretes and for each name, you get a piece of clothing. Kittredge Talbot and Woodrow, those are actually the names of Tess and Woody, Talbot and Woodrow. Talbot called, Tess was anorexic and was in a hospital for a while. So, this is Tess's background, she was anorexic, but Paul takes of her shoe and kicks it to Trent. The parents, who is the un Flan for Flanders Kittredge. Rod Island I believe new port, but not along the ocean, the street behind the ocean, who is an art dealer, they have a Kandinsky. So, they remember when he first bulges in their house, he talks about a Kandinsky.

I know that you have a children talk about double sided Kandinsky. So, this is the so it was not Tess and it was not Woody who actually spoke to Paul about their parents, who was it? Trent Conway. Ah can what is key? Kandinsky a double sided Kandinsky. Paul kicks of his other shoe, Trent catches it joyously. I feel Trent, I feel like shehzade, what is the reference to shehzade? Arabian nights, you know thousand and one yeah arabian nights. Do you know any background of that? Why is he comparing himself to princess shehzade? What was the condition? You keep telling me a story and I will allow you to leave for another day so, your one day of life in exchange for one story.

The shehzade has no other choice, but to keep her husband happy by telling him a new story every night. So, there that is the genesis of one thousand and one arabian night night stories. I feel like shehzade, for everything I get reward. For every story, I get rewarded. He embraces Paul with fears tenderness, I do not want you to leave me Paul, I will go through my address book and tell you about family after family, you will never not fit in again. We will give you a new identity so, this is the whole concept of identity is extremely important hint six degrees of separation. Because very soon we will find about that that even the identities of these very rich kids. They are also quite problematic, but because Paul is poor, is more problematic for him.

I will make you the most eagerly sort after young man in the east. Usually in this is what Henry Higgins promised Eliza do little if you remember that. You know, you will be the most eagerly sort after young lady in the street in London, in London society so, that is what. And then I will come into one of these homes one day and you will be there and I will be presented to you. And I will pretend to meet you for the first time and our friendship will be witnessed by my friends or parents friends. It is all most like you know an arrange marriage, an arrange code ship kind of thing that. One day you will be you will be so highly placed, that they would not be people would not think that, that there is anything wrong in our relationship.

Having a relationship like us, if it all happens under they are knows this they cannot judge me they cannot disparage you. I will make you a guest in their houses, ask me another name, I would like to try for that shirt, Paul that is enough for today. Paul takes his shoes and the address book and goes Trent turns to Tess. Paul stayed with me for three months, we went through that address Boletter by letter. Paul vanished by the else, Paul vanished by the else means, Larkins. Remember, the Larkins are his latest victim's doctor fine Kittredge's Larkins.

After that he was gone he took the address book with him well, he is already been in your all in houses may be, we will; I will meet him again. I sure would like to so, he is still carrying a torch for Paul, he is past his real name, I do not know anything about him. It was a rainy night in Boston, he was in a dough way that is all, he took stuff from you besides the address book. He took my stereo and sport jacket and my word processor and my laser printer and my skies and my T V. Will you press charges? No, it is a felony, why do they want to find him? They say to help him, if there is a crime, the cops will get involved.

Look we must keep in touch, we were friends for a (()) school and I mean we were really good friends, would not you press charges please. Now, what does it tell you? He does not want to he has lost so, many things to Paul, but he still does not want to press chargers, why do you think?

(())

He loves Paul.

He loves Paul, he has fallen for Paul's charisma in a big way so, there is no way that, he is going to press charges that is the appeal of Paul. That there is the kind of you know influence he has on everybody including the people in whose house is he bulges in. So, they go, who is appears, Tess played me the tapes, Tess's voice tape would not to press charges, Trent's voice taped please Ouisa to us. Now, these are the most famous lines from six degrees of separation. Can you believe it? Paul learned all that in three months, three months. Who would have thought it? Trent Conway, the Henry Higgins of our time.

The Trent Conway is as efficient as proficient linguist as Henry Higgins. He can change identities, he can change personalities, he can train black kid from the streets. In such a way, just in three months that he can pass off as the son of Sydney Poitier. Not just end the stories, he tells about himself. Remember what it is to I mean racism in America I am, I do not feel American, you see I was brought up in Europe in Switzerland. And he is able to convince his host that he is indeed to the man born and there is the power of what grooming. So, grooming matters a lot in our society that is what Guare, Guare is trying to tell us.

Paul looked at those names and said I am Columbus, I am Magellan, I will sail to this new world. So, by assuming a new identity, he set out to explore the unknown and who are the unknown for him? The very rich the very famous, otherwise he would not have access to these people. It was only by assuming an entirely new identity, a shiny new personality, that he is able to have access into these homes. Do you get the reference to Columbus and Magellan? Coming into the houses of Kittredges and Larkin is as challenging an act for someone like Paul as the discovery of the new land, for people like Columbus and Magellan.

Because the distance is that much physically the distance might not be, but socially the distance is that deep the chiasm is that deep and he has to assume an entirely new identity and a new persona to reach them. I read somewhere that everybody on this planet is separated by only six other people six degrees of separation here comes a title of the play. Between us and everybody else on this planet, the president of the United States, I (()) earlier in Venice fill in the names. I find that a tremendously comforting that we are so closed and we like Chinese water torture that we are closed.

So there is a conflict between this kind of clue, this kind of theory, it is very comfortable. That you know we can always connect to someone only through a chain of six people, but it is also extremely discomfoting, disconsulting that through a medium of six people. Or identity can be, or our privacy can be invaded, just through a medium of six people. Because, you have to find the right six people to make the connection it is not just big names its anyone, a native in rainforest at year (()) an Eskimo, I am bound to everyone on this planet by a trail of six people ,it is a profound thought.

How Paul found us, how to find the man, whose son he pretends to be, a perhaps he is his son, Although I doubted how every person is a new door opening up into other worlds, six degrees of separation between me and everyone else on this planet, but to find the right six people. Flan appears, flan to us, we did not here for a while, we went about our lives the Dorman appears who is at worse? And then see, there is a passage of a time for a very long time. Nobody heard anything about Paul, because perhaps he has not been invading the houses of the written famous, in their society they would not know about anyone else so, they did not hear of Paul at all.

And then one day our Dorman whom, with tip very well at Christmas and anytime he does something nice for us, our Dorman spit at my husband (()) I mean spit at him. So, this Dorman is spit at Mr. Flan. The Dorman is spits at flan, your son I know all about your son. Now, which son? Who is this son? No prizes for guessing, what about my son? Not the little (()) the other son, the secret son, the negro son you deny. Now, who is Paul's father? Flan Kittredge, the Dorman is fits at flan again. The negro son, the black son, you make live in central park so, you are you have disowned your son.

You have sort of sent him away, you do not recognize your own son his first to leave in central park his homeless, he is shelter less. And you are here, you are so rich who is at towards the next chapter. Rick, Elizabeth and Paul sit on the grass in central park so, who are these Rick and Elizabeth we do not know, but we will soon see Rick, Elizabeth and Paul now, picture this scenario. How picture perfect and you know absolutely like you know pastoral imagery that is what like a landscape. This is what John Guare creates a very idyllic a kind of a scene. Rick, Elizabeth a young couple and Paul ran on laughing in central park.

Rick, a nice young guy so, from the beginning we have told you a nice young guy, there is nothing wrong with him. In his mid twenties plays the guitar energetically he and Paul and Elizabeth, a beautiful girl in her mid twenties are having a great times singing a cheery song. Say James Taylor shower, the people until rick hits the wrong call, they try to break down the harmony.

Rick cannot for the life of him find the right god the three of them laughed. Paul is wearing the pink shirt now, which pink shirt is this? The same shirt that is belong once to woody and he so possessive about this shirt and he had a fight with his father because of this shirt. And then now Paul is wearing the same shirt become that must be his best shirt and now, he is talking to these young people. Tell me about yourselves, we are from ((.)).

Do they have any black people in ((.))

Maybe two, yes the mormons brought into. Who are the mormons? m o r m o n s

((.))

Right, the church of ((.)) a religious kind of maybe so, you do not have black people in ((.)) may be the church brought in we came to be actors she won the all state competition for comedian drama that was in ((.)) my gosh, the quality of mercy is not strained. A drop it like the gentle rain from heaven this is merchant of Venice, Shakespeare. Portia as his speech to Sherlock so, you will soon find that how these lines are set in a very ironic context and we study and we wait tables. Because you have to have technique, like the painters. Since than looked for the rules behind the spontaneity of his impressionism. Says that is a painter, we do not know anything about painting. My dad loves painting he has the Kandisky, but he loves as I am the most he lives up there. What? Paul, he lives up there? Count six windows over, John Flanders Kiterate, his champs call him Flan, I was the child of a flan's hippy days.

His ridicule days, he went down shout as the freedom marcher to register black voters, his friends were killed, met my mother registered her and married her in a fit of sentimental righteousness and knocked her up with me and came back here and abandoned her. Went to Harvard, he is now a fancy dealer, lives up there counts six windows over there would not see me the new wife, the white wife, the Louiza Kittredge

called me Ouisa wife, the mother of the new children wife. Now this see, she is there is a step mother over there.

I am the child when my father was in a ridicule state of mind and that is the time when my white father married my black mother and I am a product of that union. But after that, once the moment, once the ridicule ideas and ideology they got over, he came back here and he disowned my mother. He refuses to recognize me and now he has a white wife and white children so another round of identity creation for Paul, but because by perhaps by now he is done with swindling the rich people. And now, he wants to make a new connection with these this very young couple, but they do not have much money. So, what happens in next we will continue with this tomorrow. Thank you.