

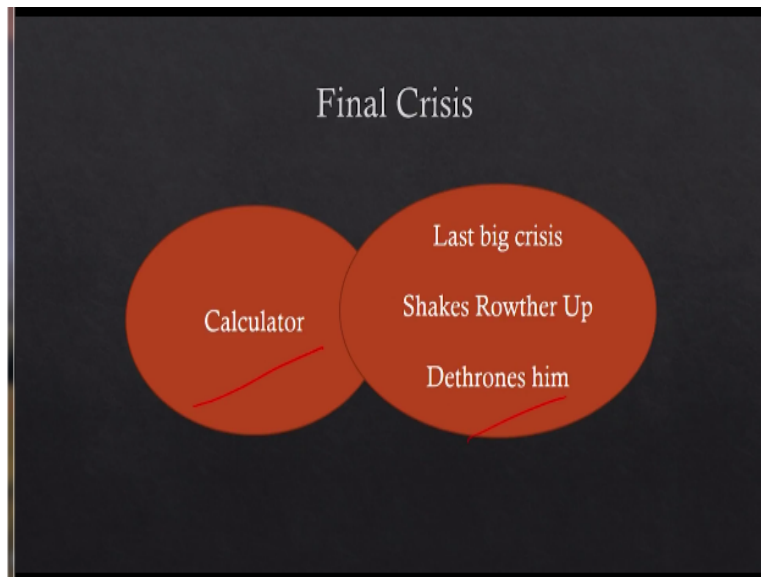
**Short Fiction in Indian Literature**  
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**Lecture-5B**

**Reading the Plot for themes in Sundara Ramaswamy's Reflowering (Continued)**

Hello and welcome back to this lecture on Sundara Ramaswamy's Reflowering. So, in this session to like in the previous session, I would be reading the plot for specific themes in this short story. And I will try to show you how and analysis of plot tells the reader something more about the various motivations and several characters in this story. Now if you remember in the previous section I had a look at the 2 major crises in this story.

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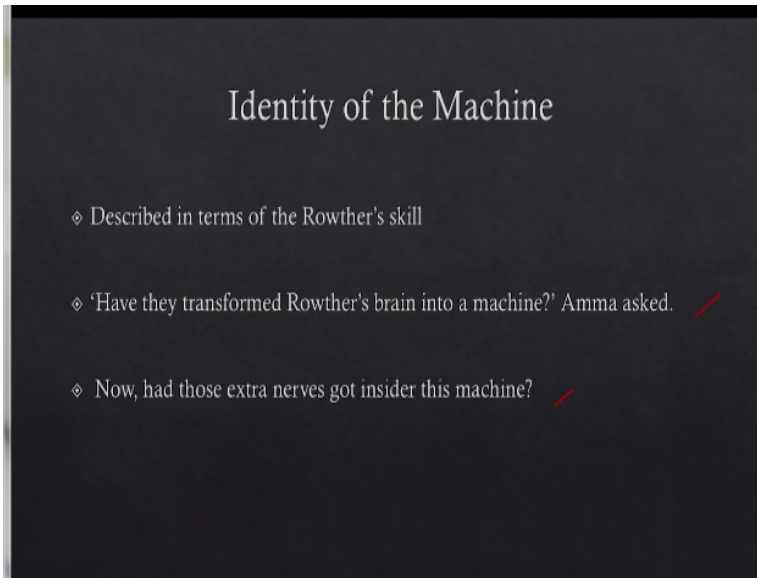


The first crisis was about the shopkeeper's refusal to give credit, clothes on credit to Rowther and the second crisis was about the auctioning of his house. So, in this session I am going to look at the final crisis in this story which is brought about by this aspect of the calculator. This new fangled material of the calculator and this calculator contributes to the last and final crisis in this story, this one really shakes Rowther Up more than auctioning of the house did to him.

In fact it Dethrones him from the position of authority that he was in (()) (01:40) all along he had this massive ego because he was aware of his superior value in the shop. And once the calculator

comes into the picture he realises that he has been dethrone by this material, this electronic device.

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Now if he look at the identity of the machine and how it is described it is very very interesting and important to see how it is describe in relation to Rowther himself. In fact the machine is compared to the human being to talk about it is merits. Look at the second point on the slide, this is the question asked by Amma the wife of the shopkeeper when she comes to know about the machine for the first time, the calculator for the first time.

And she asks have they transformed Rowther's brain into a machine, that is the question that she asked because she has no other comparison to make here except 2 Rowther who is the supreme being in terms of doing the calculation. And the final point on this slide is spoken by or narrated by this boy narrator who thinks that the calculator has got those extra nerves inside it just as Rowther himself had 3 extra nerves which makes some this super calculating human being in terms of numbers.

So, the identity of the machine and it is description and it is comparison to human beings tells us something very very interesting that between the machine and the human being, the human was considered to be superior when the calculator made it is entry into society then.

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## Machine and Man

◇ The machine can be compared only to the man

Ordinary Folks become efficient

◇ “Even I am getting it all right,” she said, “This machine is more cunning than Thatha”

So, when the calculator comes into play in this particular story lots of ordinary folks become important. Earlier Rowther was the only one who was supreme in numbers who was extraordinary in calculating numbers and who was extremely efficient in doing the sums. Now once the machine has arrived ordinary folks become efficient everybody is super good in doing the sums.

And Gomathi one of the shop assistance in the store one who has studied only up to third class and who just does the errands and cleaning up even she when she gets the machine to do the sums she gets the answers correct and she says even I am getting it all right and she makes this very very important comment that this machine is more cunning than Thatha and cunning is a very important word to use here and let us see what are the implications of this choice of word.

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Now what is the dictionary definition of the word cunning Cambridge dictionary tells us that it is the quality or skill of being clever at planning something. So, that you get what you want especially by tricking other people. So, cunning here denotes a craftiness manipulation whereas the word that she probably wants to use as cleverness. She probably wants to say that this machine is even more even cleverer than Thatha, that is what probably she wants to say.

But then she ends up using this word cunning and if you think about Gomathi, she is a girl who is known for mixing up words and the incident that comes to mind is about her mixing up of minute in inmate that she does at 1 point in the story. So, even despite this mix up this confusion in the choice of words cunning does suggest a set of implications that might have some ramification in understanding the character of Rowther.

Let us see some of them shortly, so this is the context for the educational context for Gomathi and even for Rowther. The boy narrator says that Rowther had only study up to the third class that was 2 greats less than Gomathi who work in the shop fetching and cleaning.

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## Gomathi

◇ 'Rowther had only studied up to the third class. That was two grades less than Gomathi who worked in the shop, fetching and cleaning.'

prided himself  
on his  
superiority

Now becomes  
equal to the rest

So, education has no connection to superiority in mathematical skills because both Gomathi and Rowther have studied only up to third grade and fifth grade. But the Thatha because of a superior calculations because if he is genius has come UP as the ultimate authority in doing the sums and he does rightly pride himself on his superiority but once the calculator has come into play Rowther becomes equal to the rest of the members in his society.

Even Gomathi is as superior as Thatha, even she is as equal as Rowther in terms of calculation. In fact when Gomathi suggest that the calculator is more cunning than the old man than the Thatha.

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## Final Crisis

◇ More efficient than the old man, Rowther

◇ "You are correct, Thatha" ✓

◇ Supersedes Rowther

◇ A young girl or a boy can do the sums

Power shifts

It is sets into play a set of ideas which makes the machine superior it is which kind of gives greater credit to the machine than to the human being and that trajectory really picks up in the narrator. Because if you see the following set of comments Gomathi says that you are correct Thatha, it is because she is kind of a crosschecking the sums that Rowther does you know in his mind.

So, she says she endorses that the whole manage correct in his sums and that really shocks the old man, you are saying that I am correct, I am always correct that is what he has in his mind that nobody can crosscheck him because he is the ultimate authority but now the machine has come into play the machine becomes the ultimate authority with which things are crosscheck. So, we can see that Rowther is gradually becoming superseded by this machine called calculator.

And as I mention before any young person, any young old person educated or uneducated can do the sums with the help of the calculator with basic amount literacy at their hands. And the bottom line for this set of ideas is this. There is a big power shift from Rowther to the rest of the community in the shop because any one of them in the shop with the calculator can do the sums and get the bill correctly done.

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## Final Crisis

- ◆ Rowther gave her a sum. Gomathi gave the right answer. He tried sum after sum on her. She had the correct answer each time. Rowther turned pale. 'Dear God, I am so dumb I cannot understand anything,' he muttered.
- ◆ I am not doing the sums, Thatha,' said Gomathi. 'It's the machine.'
- ◆ She stuffed the calculator into his hands.
- ◆ Rowther's hands shook as he took the calculator. His fingers trembled. He touched the front of the calculator, then the back.

Now, when Gomathi's crosschecking the sums of Rowther, Rowther does not know the she has a calculator at hand. So, when she says that you are correct Thatha. He understands that she is

doing it in step by step using her own brain and he tries to test her. So, this is the extract that I want to read quickly for you. Rowther gave her a sum, Gomathi gave the right answer, he tried sum after sum on her, she had the correct answer each time, Rowther turned hail.

He cannot accept competition there and he says dear god, I am so dumb, I cannot understand anything he met her. He cannot understand how a little girl compete with him and get the maths correct and she immediately says I am not doing the sums Thatha said Gomathi it is the machine, she is stuff the calculator into his hands, Rowther hands shock as he took the calculator his fingers trembled, he touch the front of the calculator and then the back.

So, he tries to kind of feel this thing you know he touches the surface of the front and a back of the calculator because we need to remember that he is a blind man and he understands things and people by touching them. And we can immediately make the connection to an earlier scene where he again touches and feels somebody to understand to get a sense of their identity and place in society and that is Ambi, when Ambi enters the house of Rowther, he kind of asks him to come close.

And he touches his face to understand, welcome and talk to him, so he does the same thing with this calculator and he is totally disoriented. He says I do not want this calculator you keep it and that is the following a dialogue that takes place in this story.

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Final Crisis

- ◊ Believes Gomathi to be outsmarting him
- ◊ The machine is a newfangled device.
- ◊ Returns the machine and becomes silent

The one and only person who is a math whiz

So, when we look at this extract and try to analyse it to begin with he realises that Gomathi is outsmarting him and he cannot take him, he cannot understand that context for the situation when a young person can outsmart him, be cleverer than him. Because as I said he is of the top of the hierarchy, top of the pile and he admits or welcomes or considers no other competition there and this machine is a new fangled device that is come to dethrone him.

And he does not like it, he does not accept it, he wants nothing to do with it. So, what he does is he returns the machine and becomes terribly silent. So, the understanding here that we get from an from a reading of this except that he is the one and only person who wants to be a math whiz around this show up. And that is a very selfish under the same time a child like attitude is there in that kind of desire.

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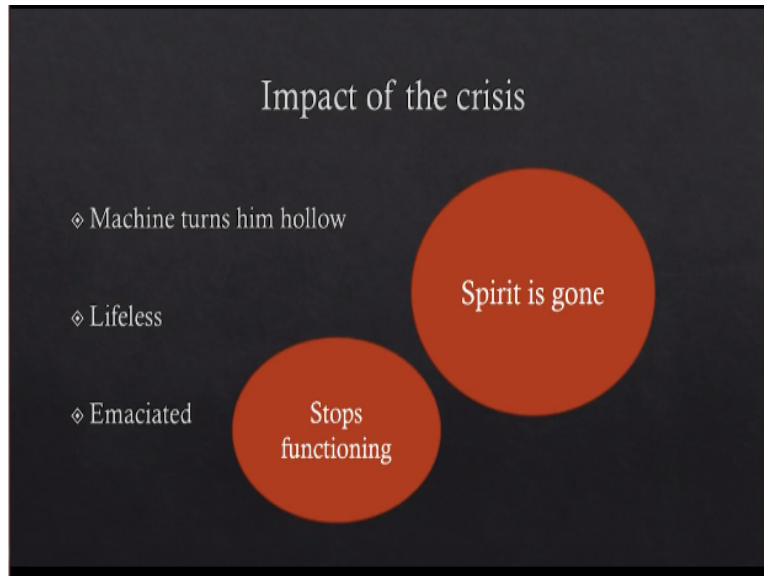
## Impact of the Crisis

- ◇ He continued to come to the shop regularly but after that looked and acted like a walking corpse. It seemed as if all the laughter, happiness, repartee, teasing, sarcasm, had been drained from him. His voice was slow, hesitant. Even his body looked thinner.
- ◇ Appa had stopped asking him to do the bills.

Okay, so what is the impact of the crisis brought about by the calculator, once the calculator has come into the picture Rowther continue to come to the shop regularly. But after that looked in acted like a walking corpse, it seem as if all the laughter, happiness, repartee, teasing, sarcasm, had been drained from him, taken from him. His voice was slow, hesitant even his body looked thinner. Appa had stopped asking him to do the bills.

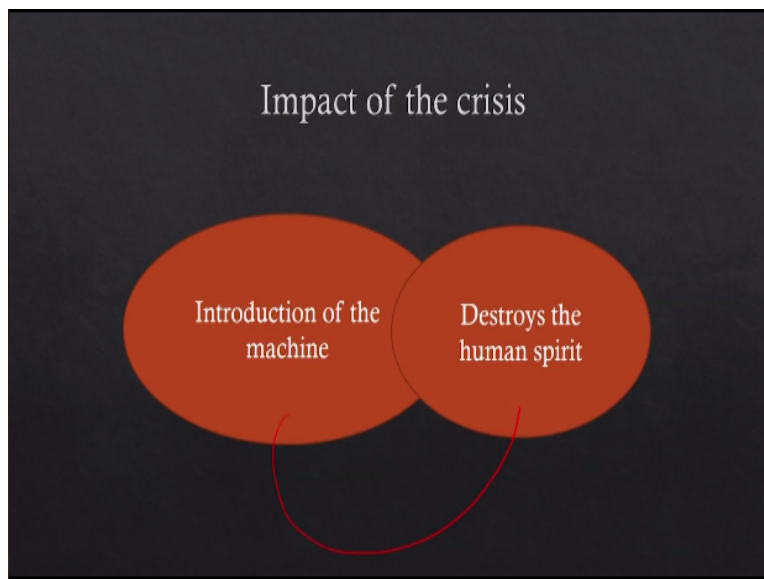
So, the physical and emotional impact brought about by this invention of maternity is clearly visible on the mind and the person of Rowther and the immediate impact is that the shopkeeper, the shop owner stops asking him to do the calculations of the material that is bought and sold in the shop okay.

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So, the machine clearly turns him hollow, it empties him out, it makes him lifeless and even physically he becomes emaciated and we can clearly see this spirit is gone too. The spirit of Rowther this spirit that is about repartee, (( )) (13:18) remarks that he makes the laughter, the happiness, the joy of his life is gone, the human spirit is taken away from him by this modern device and he stops functioning in the shop, he is no longer useful for the cloth shop.

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So, the relationships are pretty clear and the thematic relevance of this crisis also pretty clear. The introduction of the machine destroys the human spirit of Rowther and that is very symbolic that is a very symbolic message of the story of is to the reader that the invention of machinery

could do damage to the human psyche they can replace human beings they can make them they can marginalise them.

They can totally make them dispensable, so that is the impact at this point and this story on Rowther . The other thing is that it takes the confidence out of this old man as well look at the way he becomes slow and hesitant there is no any confidence about him just as there was to begin with. If you remember the first crisis even after first crisis when he refuses to go back to work Rowther is very confident when he when the little boy goes to his house.

He just sits there like a lord at the centre of the room where he is and he invites this boy in. So, there is power there is confidence there, there is after knowledge in his value and position in society and that is completely gone now at this final prices when he becomes very slow in his movements in the way he responds and he becomes hesitant because he is no longer sure about things.

So, that self conscious and his self consciousness about his importance has been taken away by the introduction of this machine that can do maths for anybody. So, he is no longer the lord all his surroundings, he is no longer the lord either at home or in the cloth shop because his purpose in life is gone okay.

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## Resolution

◇ Rowther catches a mistake in the price when the bill is made ✓

◇ 'Do you remember all the prices?' ✓

◇ 'It is God's will,' said Rowther.

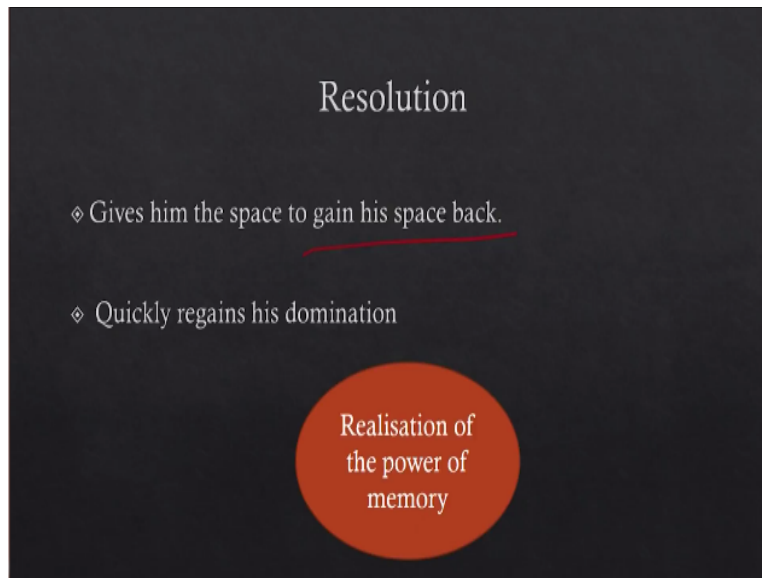
So, how we have seen the crisis now, we have seen 3 major crises in the story. The first crisis as I said is about the purchase of clothes on credit and the shopkeeper refuses to give him credit. And then Rowther goes home in a half and he is brought back again, it because it seems like habitual rituals between the 2. So, that is the first crisis, in second crisis about the house and how it is being auctioned and the shopkeeper steps in, saves him .

And you know brings her back to the cloth shop that is a second crisis and now we have seen third crisis where the calculator comes into play. And things become complicated because Rowther is completely becomes you know in valuable sort of speak for the members of that cloth shop. So, how this crisis is resolved this is how it is resolved when Rowther captures a mistake in the price when the bill is made.

So, Ambi is sitting and doing the calculation of number of things and Murugan is reciting the price of each and every material and Rowther says that is not the price of that material is something else. And everybody suddenly gather around him and realise that Rowther is correct and Murugan is wrong and that case she attention of the shop owner who says do you remember all the prices.

And Rowther says it is God's will and then the shop owner tests him, he kind of ask the price of what is the biggest towel, the smallest towel everything in the store and Rowther is spot on every single type. And everybody suitably impressed and once again they begun to realise the value of this old man and his value really resides in the fact that he has impressive memory power. As soon as Rowther realises that he just gets back on the (()) (17:32) and let us see how that happens.

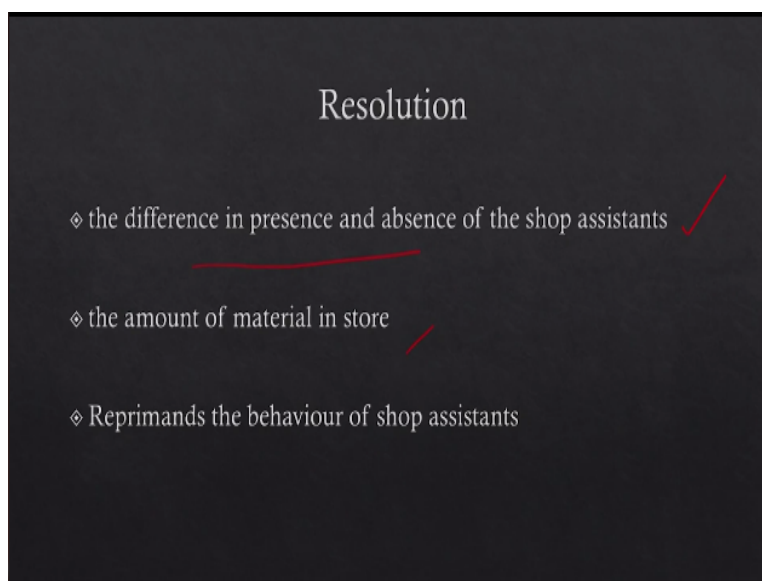
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So, this realisation on the part of Rowther that he is still valuable because if his memory it gives him the space to gain his space back the authority back . And he quickly regains his domination of the cloth shop and that power of memory is really crucial and Rowther exploits the power of memory to quickly make certain things evident for the benefit of the shop owner.

He tells the shop owner very exactly and indirectly that he is really useful in running the cloth shop shipshape. So, he immediately this is the first point that I want to explore a little bit.

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He tells the shopkeeper that he knows the presence and absence of the shop assistance because he says that he knows their smell, he says everybody has a particular smell and he is in tune with

that. So, that in that smell is absent he knows that particular shop assistant is away from the shop. And he gives the example of Kolappan and he does it very very indirectly he says that sir have you paid the electricity bill.

Because it is the last date today and immediately the shop owner says where is Kolappan column he has to pay the bill. And then he says Kolappan not around see you do not notice this I do notice this thing. So, he indirectly suggest that he is a powerful presence he is like a supervisor who knows the happenings of the shop inside out more than the owner of the store.

And he also tells the owner very clearly that he knows the price of each and every single material in the store. And he also offers information to the shop owner about how Murugan the other way turned away a customer saying that they did not have a particular kind of Vesti a particular kind of waste cloth and then when in fact they did have the vasties for sale and Murugan did not know about it.

So, all this information when it comes one after the other it makes everybody aware of the fact that this man who was a math genius is also extremely powerful in his knowledge about the shop and that he has in his memory everything stored.

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Resolution

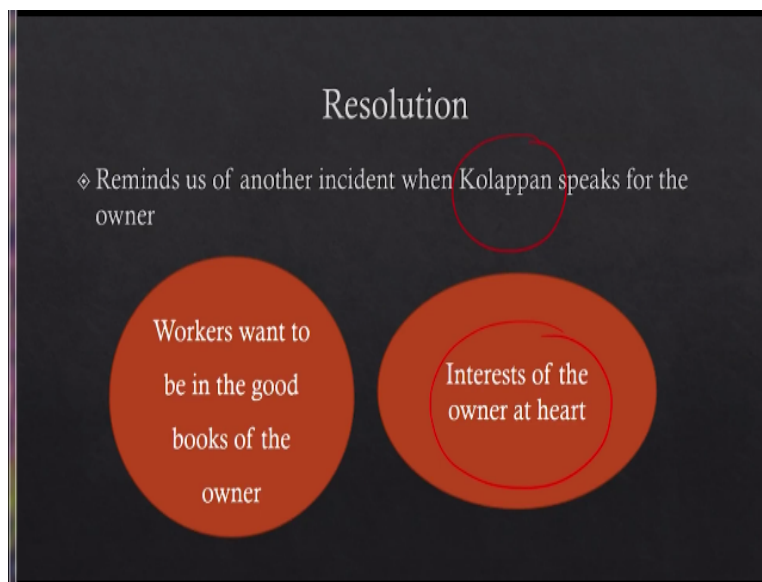
- ◆ Catches the mistake of Murugan twice
- ◆ 'You have sold ten metres. You could have lost ten rupees. Are you here to give away ayya's money to everyone who comes in from the street?'

Speaks on behalf of the owner

So, as we could see that he catches the mistake of Murugan not once but twice and the first thing I want to go back to the first mistake that Murugan makes and I want to read the attitude of Rowther in that particular context. So, he says you have sold 10 meters of that particular cloth, you could have lost 10 rupees or you here give away yes money to everyone who comes in from this tree.

So, you can see that he is clearly dropping Murugan in at this point and he place it bare for the shop owner to realise that he has a slip short shop assistance in Murugan who is not careful about the knowledge of the prices of the material in this store. So, when he does this kind of speech about Murugan to the shop owner he speaks almost on the behalf of the owner he tells the indirectly that he has the benefit of the cloth shop in mind and that it is profitable, consequently for the owner to keep on employing him.

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And again he reminds as if another incident this particular attitude of this worker called Rowther remains of the attitude of another worker Kolappan about another incident, if you recall the second crisis this shop owner rescues Rowther's house by paying (()) (21:57) some of money , he also pays the legal fees so he rescues Rowther financially.

But despite that Rowther goes and works for a Chettiyar in his shop the very next day. And before the shop owner can get wild up can get angry about that we have Kolappan get angry on

the behalf of the shop owner. He says that he is an idiot, he could be a maths genius, he is an idiot, so, that anger on the behalf of the shop owner has a parallel.

Here when Rowther gets angry with Murugan on the behalf of the owner, so we can see parallels here in the attitudes of the workers and what is that tells every worker wants to be in the good books of the owner at the expense of his colleagues of fellow workers in the store, in this particular story. So, everybody seems to have the interest of the owner at heart but not the reputation of their fellow workers or the colleagues and that is very important note in the context of this particular story.

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The slide has a dark background. At the top center, the word "Resolution" is written in a light-colored serif font. Below it, a quote is displayed: "Oh Lord Muruga, you merrily send customers away by telling them we don't have what we do actually have. Are we here for business or for charity?". The words "Oh Lord Muruga" are circled in red. Below the quote, there are two red ovals. The left oval contains the text "His teasing sarcasm is back." followed by "How didn't he respond then?". The right oval contains the text "Mistakenly sends customers away".

So, look at the way again when Rowther realises that he is back on track his attitude itself brings back we have the teasing, sarcastic behaviour back in his tone and that is quite clear look at the fun on the word lord Muruga because Murugan he commits a connection to lord Muruga there. And he says oh Lord Muruga, have you send customers away by telling them we do not have what we do actually have away here for business or for charity.

So, he mocks his fellow worker Murugan thereby comparing him to lord Muruga and he says that you know you act like a lord but you do not know the specifics of the details in the shop and who bring upon losses for this shop owner. So, he says you merely send customers away by



telling them we do not have what we do actually have. So, he mocks Murugan he **he** kind of teases him, so, the human spirit is back within Rowther.

But what is interesting about this particular incident is that why did not Rowther mention the fact that the vesties are there in the store why was he silent when he saw that conversation happening between Murugan and that customer why did not interject and say wait Murugan that particular thing is back in the shops. So, you know you can sell at he does not interject that why that is the big question, why has he been silent then, so that question needs to be thought about.

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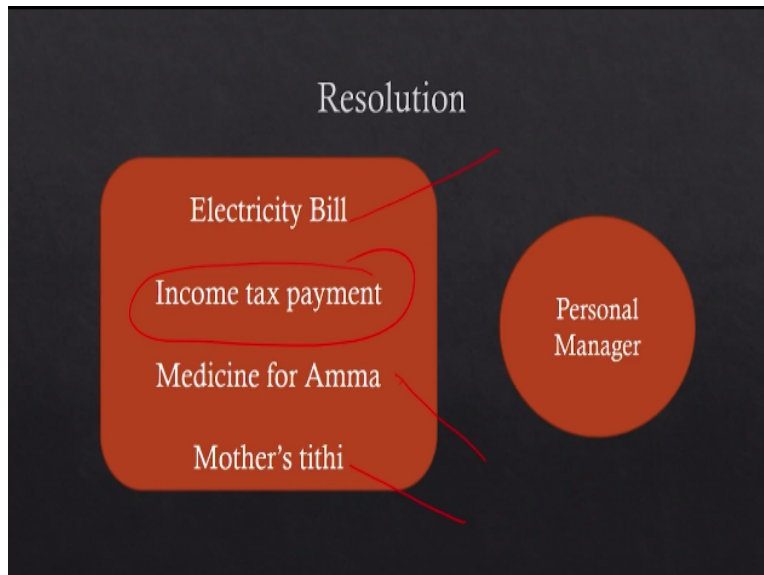
Now we can clearly see that Rowther rests the control of the shop back after he realises the power of his memory. And then he realises that he has become a sort of a supervisor of the rest of the staff in that particular store. And that he has the necessary authority and the knowledge and the skill to do that.

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So, things are pretty clear the power of memory with the good eye or good ear for detail really helps Rowther to get his dominion of the shop back. And he exploits that skill to his benefit and he tells the owner very circle that he is once again very very valuable to the shop owner if he wants the shop to run on profit.

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So, look at some of the things that he reminds the shop owner about the first thing as I mention was the electricity bill. He says that today is the last day have you pay the bill and that thing has to functions that remind has 2 functions, 1 it shows that he remembers the fact that today is the last day and that is useful for the owner and the second thing is that it also captures the slip short

behaviour of a shop assistant who has forgotten about it and who does not turn up for work as well.

So, it has 2 benefits there for Rowther and second thing the he remains the shop owner is about his income tax payment. He says that have you notice that the income tax payment is due. So, it is high time you went and met your auditor, so that is another reminder very crucial reminder something that is connected to the running of the shop as successful running of the shop without any kind of problems arising in the future.

And thirdly he reminds the owner about the medicine that he needs to purchase for Amma Ambi's mother. So, this is a personal reminder and this is also very important reminder because if you remember Amma is an invalid with asthma problem. So, he reminds the owner to get medicines for her and he says good thing you remind it me, I have to do that and finally he also reminds the owner about his mother's the dead anniversary event that is you know round the corner.

He says that why do not you ask Murugan to remind the priest about it on his way home. So, these things kind of touch upon various aspects of life for the shop owner, it **it** touches on the business side, he touches on the personal side and he touches on the you know help aspect of his family too, especially in relation to a most health issues. So, he can see that he has almost turned himself into a successful personal manager very very in valuable role that he takes the boat himself and he does did very very smoothly okay.

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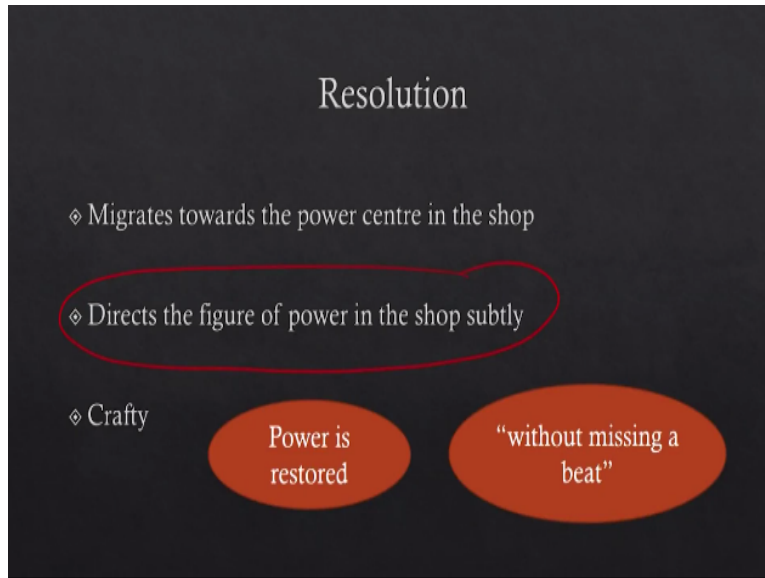
## Resolution

- ◇ That evening Rowther moved away from the bill making section and went and sat down beside Appa.
- ◇ If I am by your side I will be more helpful, ayya, he said and , without missing a beat, and 'if you increase the speed of the fan a little, I will also get some breeze'.
- ◇ Appa gave the appropriate order.

So, we can see this power shift happening in a very very literal manner at 1 point in the story towards it is finally and I am going to read that relevant except here that evening Rowther moved away from the bill making section and sat down beside Appa. He says if I am buyer side I will be more helpful ayya he said and without missing a beat and if you increase the speed of the fan a little, I will also get some breeze, Appa gave the appropriate order.

So, it is very clear that he moves from the bill making section and he moves and sits beside upper the owner of this shop. So, he is migrating towards the power centre in the cloth store and he says that if I am buyer side I will be more helpful and if he gets the benefit of being closer to the power centre when he says that please increase the speed of the fan, he does it without missing a beat and very interestingly appa just gives the appropriate order, so he does what Rowther wants him to do.

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So, we can see that there is a migration on the part of Rowther towards the power centre in the shop and he directs the figure of power in the store which has the shop owner and that manipulation is done very subtly but it is manipulation all right. And it tells us that Rowther is a very crafty fellow in some respects he could be a financial math. But he is crafty in certain aspects and how to manage people.

So, in that area he is really he very very clever and the balance of power is restored when Rowther gets his a space back and he does it without missing of beat that phrase is very interesting because as soon as he knows that his memory is terribly valuable, he just very quickly ascends the power hierarchy and he gets his throne back so to speak.

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## Identity

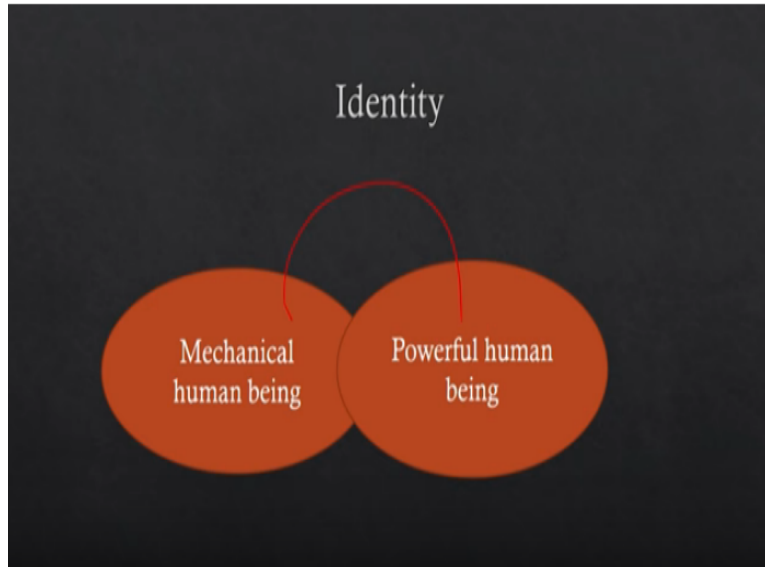
- ◆ 'Won't you be doing the bills any more, Thatha?'
- ◆ 'Ibrahim Hassan Rowther is no longer a mere adding machine. He is now the manager. It is God's will,' Rowther replied.

First name is  
mentioned

And this is the final lines of this story when once is given all the directions to everybody he leaves the shop with the shop owner and Gomathi the girl who is helping him get home she asks Won't you being doing the bills any more, Thatha and he says Ibrahim Hassan Rowther is no longer a mere adding machine, he is now the manager, it is God's will, Rowther replied and it is very very important to know that this is the first time we get a mention of this full name of Rowther.

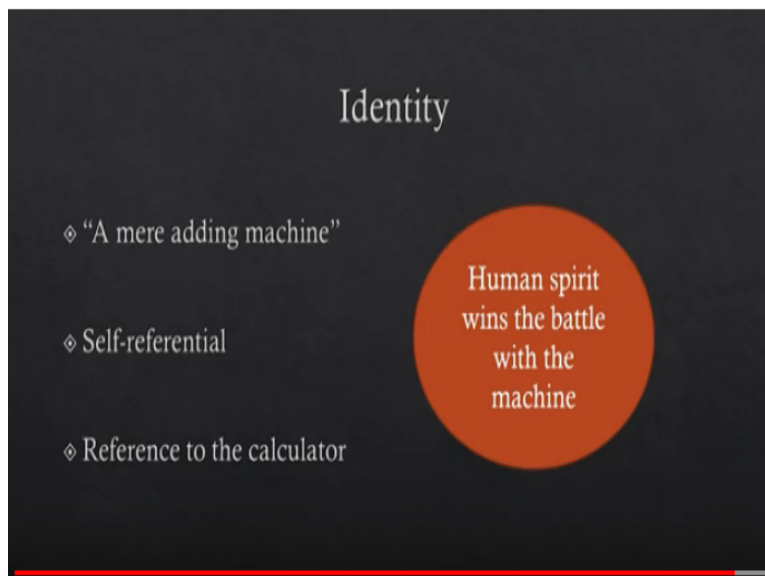
That is Ibrahim Hassan Rowther it is as if he is got a unique identity back in his life which makes him a spell it out for everybody's benefit he is no longer the adding she is no longer a calculating human device he is become the manner that he runs the show. And he says that is God's will, so it is a very very nice touch and twist at the end of the story it ends are high note for Rowther.

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So, as I said the mechanical human being is transformed into a powerful human being and that is a big achievement for this old man. So, he wins the battle of wits.

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So to speak with this machine, so again this idea of being add mere adding machine spoken by Rowther gives us a window into his life which worse sort of like a mechanical one because everybody saw him as just a person who does the math and nothing else.

So, he was valuable only in that regard, so machine the reference to machine as a mere adding machine tells us that he is treating machines in a demeaning way as a they do not have any brains or identity for themselves. So, that interesting phrase need to be kept in mind and in this context

between machines and human beings, human beings are the superior ones because they do not do anything mechanically there are a lot of other things into play there.

And obviously the human spirit wins the battle with the machine in this particular story and machines are degraded in some sense because the human being gets on top of the machine in a metaphor itself, thank you for watching I will catch up with you in the next session.