

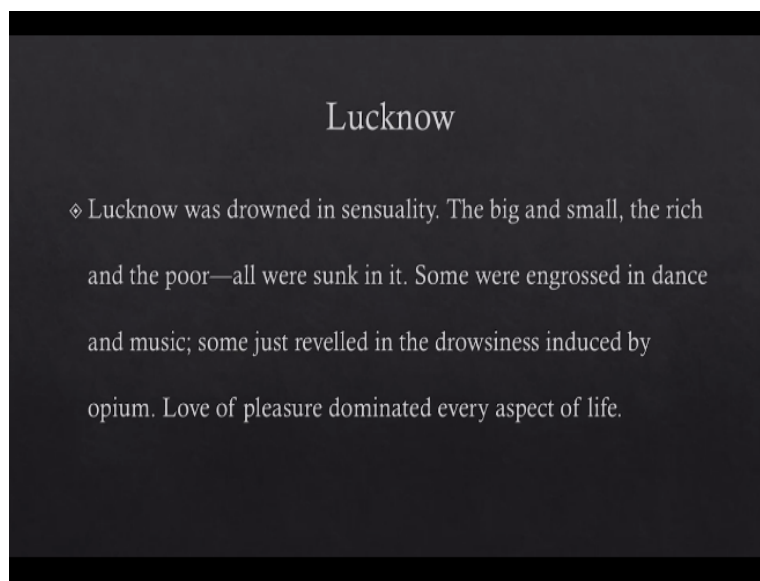
Short Fiction in Indian Literature
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Lecture – 06B
Short Story Structure and Premchand's The Chess Players

Hello and welcome back to this session on short story structure and Premchand's The Chess Players. So this is a story which is highly structured in terms of the incidents and the function that it serves to play out interesting and important thematic ideas in the story. So the story begins at a particular aristocrat's house and then it moves to another aristocrat's house and we can sense the parallelisms or the parallels that we can draw between the two homes and between these two homes and the society at large in Lucknow and the country itself.

And Premchand is at pains to emphasize the luxuries that are dominant in society at that particular time and he points a finger of blame at the luxurious pursuits of the people in the society and he suggest that that is the reason behind the downfall of a particular society itself.

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So let us have a quick look at Lucknow society through the lens of Premchand's The Chess Players. Lucknow was drowned in sensuality. The big and small, the rich and the poor were all sunk in it. Some were engrossed in dance and music; some just reveled in the drowsiness induced by opium. Love of pleasure dominated every aspect of life.

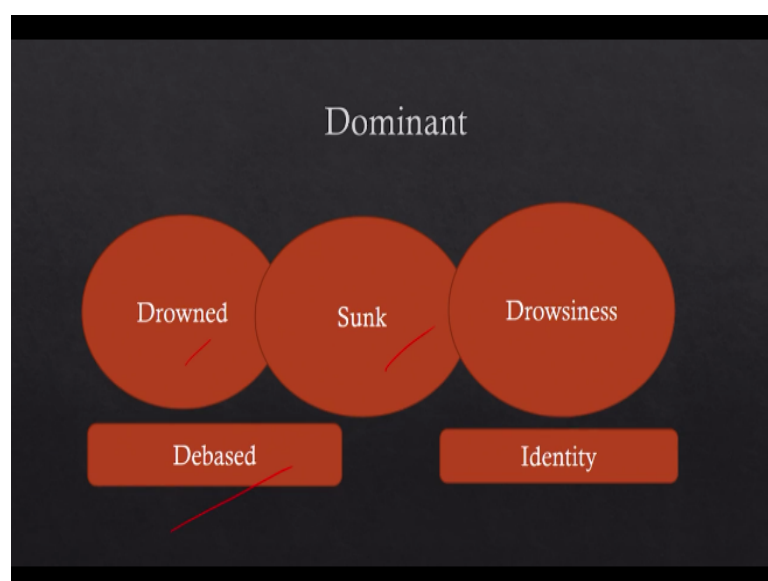
It is very interesting to see that Lucknow is projected as being completely corrupt. Even the poor, the lower orders in society have been corrupted by sensual activities and in my previous session I pointed out the difference between the people of Lucknow and the people in the country side. So there is a contrast there and how the city folks are taking out the wealth from the country side and they are putting it to bad use in the city.

So Lucknow and its wealthy and the poor are equally implicated in this pursuit of negative activities in society. So the big and small, the rich and poor, look at the rhetoric in which this particular story has been woven and they were all sunk in it, they were all fallen into this well of ruin, some were engrossed in dance and music, some were interested in the arts, some just reveled in the drowsiness induced by opium.

So there is a sense of being unconscious or semiconscious. Life has become just a very, very sedate, drowsy state for most of the people and pleasure dominates every aspect of life in this particular society in every order of the society as well. So the mood in this particular extract is one of passivity, sensuality and drowsiness, inactivity. So all these adjectives are kind of set up the tone for the city of Lucknow.

And we got to remember that this is the fictional representation of Lucknow of the 19th century by Premchand. Lucknowi culture has been written upon in a highly positive light by historians and cultural critics but the picture that we get of Lucknow in this particular story is one that is out of the fictional imagination of Premchand.

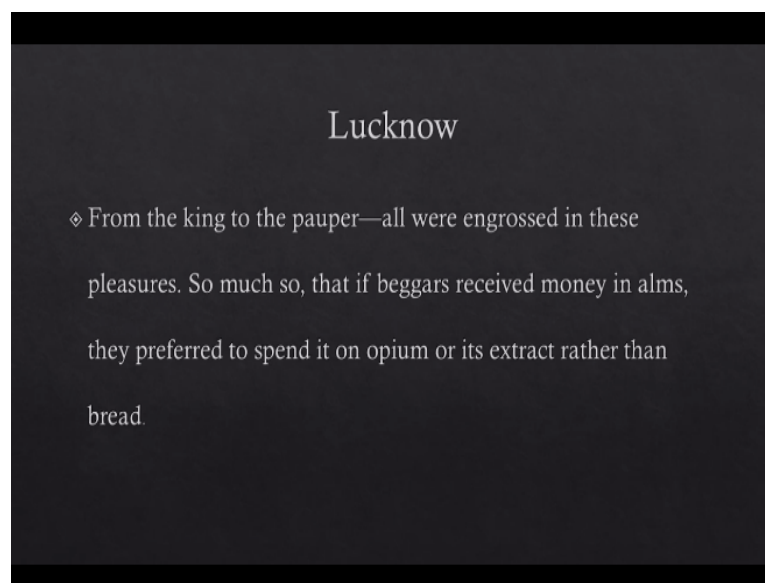
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So as I said the dominant characteristic in Lucknow society are described in these words, drowned, sunk, drowsiness. All these words suggest that people have been debased, have been degraded in society and their identity is somehow submerged. When everybody is indulging in pleasure, it becomes difficult to kind of identify the personal attributes, the personal characteristics of the individuals in society because everybody is tired by this brush of pleasure, of sensuality, of drowsiness.

So it becomes difficult to kind of take out the individualistic, the active aspect of a person's identity.

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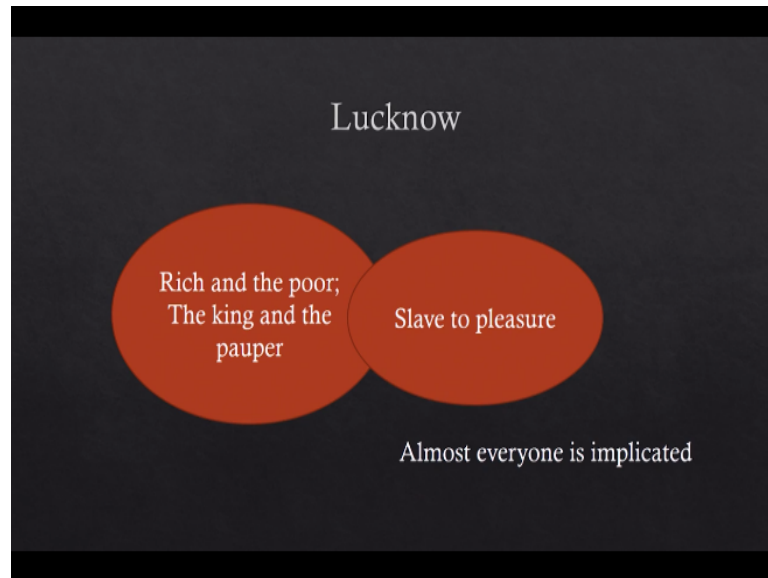


So from the king to the pauper, all were engrossed in these pleasures. So much so that if beggars received money in alms, they preferred to spend it on opium or its extract rather than bread and this is very, very tragic. The last statement on the slide there that if you know the poor people if they got the money in alms, they would use it to get a sedative, stimulant rather than healthy food that would be nutritious for their system.

So everybody in this society, all ranks of people, all ranks in society have been corrupted, debased and they were all become addict so to speak of this particular idea of pleasure from the king to the pauper. So the Nawab is also indirectly indicated to be involved in the pursuits of pleasure. There is no specific large scale description of the Nawab indulging in the pursuits of pleasure.

There are references here and there which tells the readers that the Nawab is also enjoying the pleasures of female company and music and other pursuits but there is a really interesting reference here that from the highest to the lowest person in society everybody is addicted, everybody is engrossed, cocked up in this web of pleasure and sensuality.

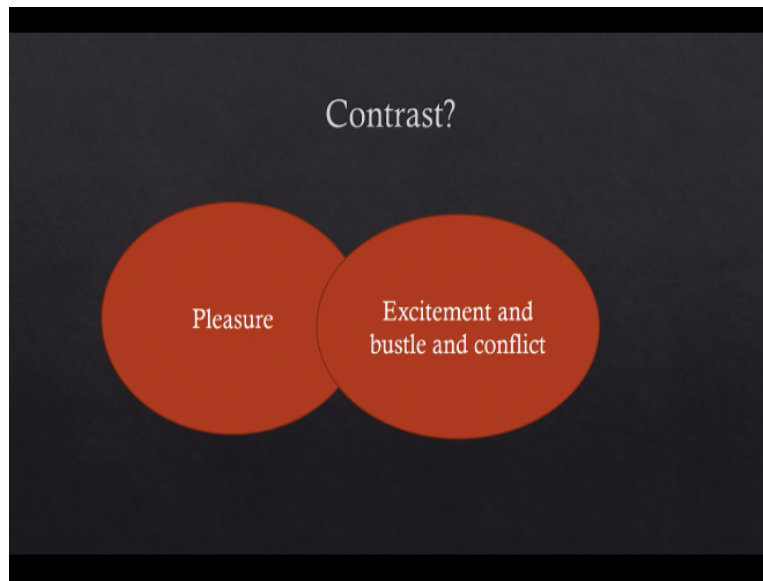
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So as I said everybody has become a slave to pleasure which means everybody is implicated. Everybody becomes a criminal in this society that Premchand depicts. If you think back to all the characters that pass through the landscape of Lucknow which is the stage for the chess players, nobody is perfect, no character which has been delineated fully or even you know to a greater extent or even marginally nobody gets away in a good light.

Everybody is implicated in the corruption in the epidemic that has spread this landscape of Lucknow and if you can point a finger of blame at someone you can equally point the finger of blame at somebody else too.

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So do we have any kind of contrast in the story which is about pleasure and if you remember the beginning of the story is also a lengthy description of the different kinds of pleasures in which the people of Lucknow are engaged in. So if it is all about pleasure, do we get even a little bit of contrast, a different kind of emotion which can be juxtaposed in this particular story because a story is about conflict is not it.

We cannot have the same kind of incident one after the other to make up a story. So the story is not only about a chain of events, it is a chain of interesting and different events which will bring a crisis to the central characters in the story. So if it is pleasure can we discriminate, can we find some kind of nuances in those pleasure pursuits, which will cause problem in the story world and we do have that kind of contrast here okay.

So some pleasures bring excitement, bustle and conflict in the story. So the game of chess is a fantastic example there because we have a lot of conflicts in the game of chess. It is usually a game that is kind of compared to the political struggle that is happening in the big wide world. So this game is full of conflicts, it is about attack, it is about counter moves, it is about checkmating the king, it is about you know killing the knight and things like that. So we do have a lot of excitement and bustle and conflict in the game of chess.

And one particular extract in the story spells out the various kinds of struggles, the various kinds of moves and counter moves that are fought between the two participants in the game of chess and the two participants obviously are Mir and Mirza.

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Mir's home

◇ Newest strategies were being charted, newest castling moves devised. There would be arguments and accusations, but soon the two friends would be reconciled. Sometimes the game would be terminated midway, and the estranged Mirza sahib would walkout and go home, and Mir sahib would go inside. But the night's sleep would dissolve the last day's resentment and the two friends would be back in the *dewankhana*.

So while there is political threat to Lucknow on the part of the East India Company in 1856 instead of getting a glimpse of the political machinations, the political strategies that are being charted by the Nawab or by his ministers or by the officers of the state we do get a glimpse of the moves that are strategized by these two aristocrats over a chessboard and that is very, very ironic and Premchand is almost making a satire of the society of Lucknow at that particular point.

So we have this particular extract here which is offering us a glimpse in an ironic fashion of the conflicts in this particular narrative and the conflicts are conflicts of play in the game of chess. Newest strategies were being charted, newest castling moves devised, there would be arguments and accusations but soon the two friends would be reconciled. Sometimes the game would be terminated midway and estranged Mirza Sahib would walk out and go home and Mir Sahib would go inside.

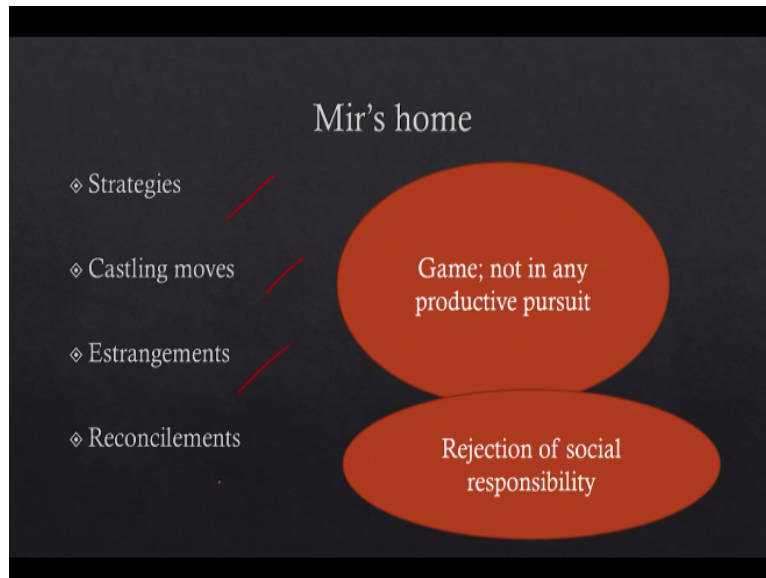
But the night sleep would dissolve the last day's resentment and the two friends would be back in the dewankhana. So they formulated new moves that would outsmart the opponent and they would make new castling moves to put the other participant, other person in danger in terms of the game of chess and there would be fights and arguments between the two friends over the game of chess.

But then sometimes they would get reconciled within the same day and sometimes they would just stop the game and one of the person obviously Mirza who would walk out and go

home and after the night's rest, he would get reconciled and he would be back in the friend's home to start another game of chess.

So all these fights and arguments and strategies are chalked out over this chessboard in almost a virtual world, in an alternative world which had no connection to ground reality to the reality of 1856 Lucknow.

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So as I said all these strategies, castling moves, estrangements, differences of opinion you know becoming estranged, becoming bitter with another becoming reconciled becoming friends once again all these are happening in an alternative world in this world of chess and that game is not productive pursuit and that is the problem. These aristocrats do not play the game of chess as a hobby.

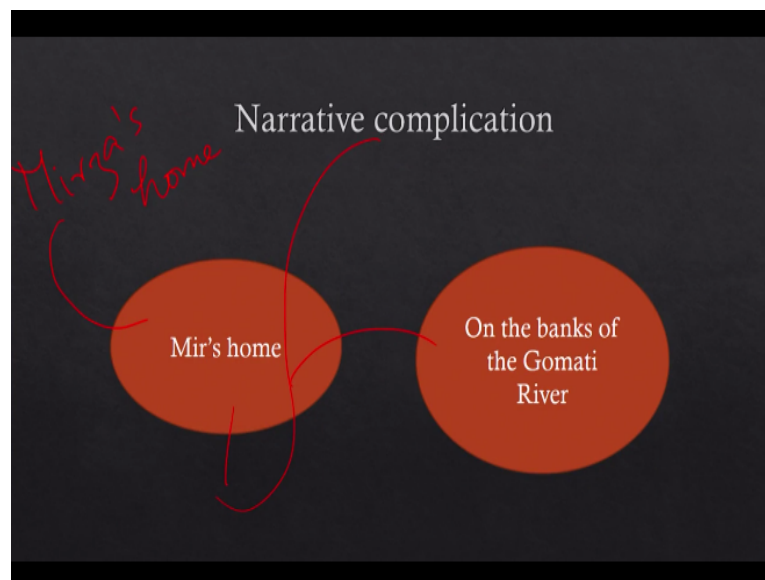
But that becomes the life for them, it becomes a fantastic escapist game, an activity that takes them away from the social responsibilities, the moral responsibilities, the familiar responsibilities that they have to their wives, the society, to the king, to the Nawab and this rejection of social responsibility is the root problem in Lucknow's society according to Premchand's imagination in this particular story.

So one of the themes if you want to arrive at a theme in this particular story is this, a rejection of social responsibility will inevitably cause problems for you in the long run. A problem that will not only affect you but also affect those around you and it has far reaching consequences

for the country, the nation and the global social order itself. So everybody is implicated in this particular story.

And that implication is neatly you know laid out before the eyes of the reader for everybody to see.

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So what is the narrative complication? So we have seen in this story so far that we have a game of chess being played at one aristocrat's house and because there is complication arising from the displeasure of the aristocrat's wife, it is being moved to another aristocrat's home Mir's home and then there is further complication there. So we have two major incidents in this particular story before the crises actually arrives.

So we need to remember the two scenes and the two stages of this particular story before we think about the crisis that happens in the story. So the story is going to move from Mir's home, it was initially in Mirza's home if you remember, so the story has moved from Mirza's home to Mir's home and it is eventually going to move to the banks of the river Gomati. Now let us see what is the complication here which makes the two friends move from Mir's home to Gomati, a river bank.

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Crisis in Mir's home

◇ "I can't tell you. He has been summoned. May be, he has to provide some soldiers for the king's army. Jagirdari is no fun. If he has to go to the battlefield, he'll know what it is."

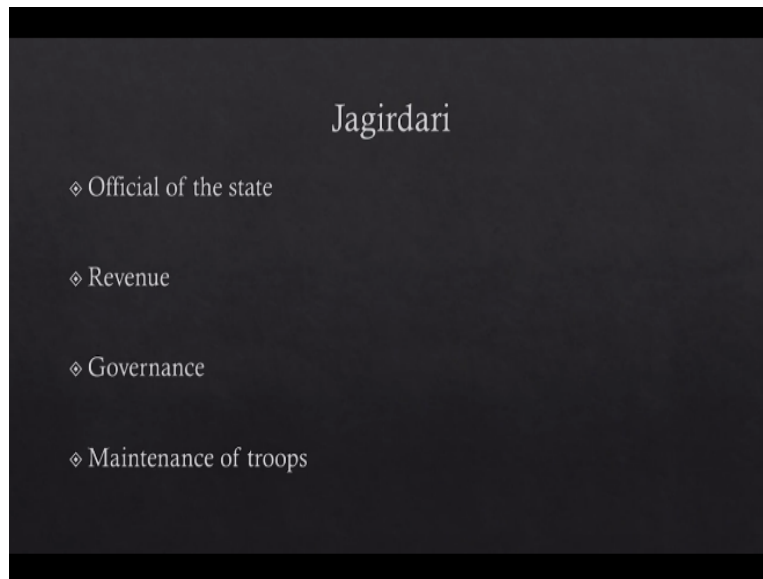
So while they are playing this game of chess in Mir's home, we get a visitor, a messenger in fact from the king and the messenger tells Mir's servant that the master is expected by the king, the master is called, summoned by the king and the servant asks him what is the purpose of the summons and the messenger says I cannot tell you, he has been summoned, maybe he has to provide some soldiers for the king's army.

Jagirdari is no fun, if he has to go to the battlefield, he will know what it is. So the messenger arrives at the doorstep of Mir and he speaks to Mir's servant and he is very abrupt and brusque and he says that perhaps the king wants him to provide troops for his army and he says the system of aristocracy Jagirdari is not an easy job, it is quite demanding and he will know that once he goes to the battlefield he will know the actual responsibility, the real nature of Jagirdari, the system of aristocracy that is being practiced in the society of today.

So the messenger in fact reminds the servant of the duties of the aristocrat and the readers also get a glimpse of the activities that he is supposed to do or contribute to the society and that contribution particularly at this moment in history is about offering troops to the battle that is supposed to be fought by the Nawab and we can easily see a little bit of arrogance on the part of the king's messenger there.

And we will know what exactly that arrogance is evident in the speech of the messenger. Now we will quickly look at what exactly is this Jagirdari.

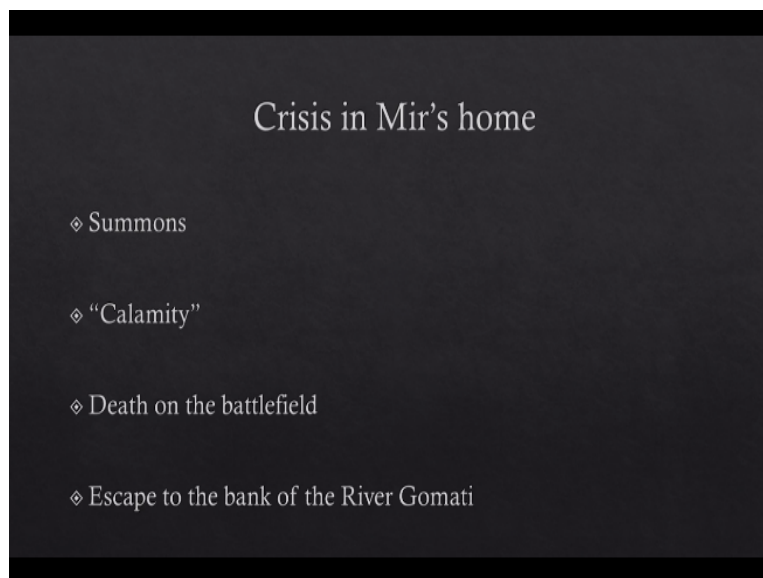
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It is a system of running the state, running a country where the ruler, the king appoints officers, they call the officers of the state the aristocrats who will collect revenue for a particular region and that particular region they will govern and in return for this sort of privilege that the official receives from that region, he has to offer troops to the king at times of trouble, at times of crisis.

So he has to maintain a body of troops, a contingent of troops and he has to send them to the king when he needs them to fight a battle. So this is the contract between the official of the state, the aristocrat and the ruler of the state.

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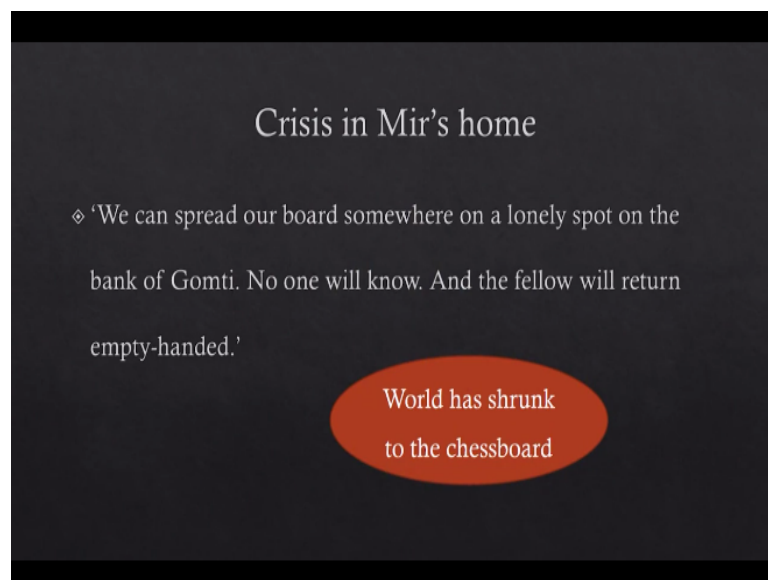
So we have this crisis in Mir's home when we see this messenger from the king who is calling Mir back to the king. So Mir sees this as a calamity, as a great disaster. This summons

a scene as a disaster that has befallen on him. So they quickly imagine both Mir and Mirza imagine that they would die on the battlefield if they go to the king and offer troops and if they fight a battle on the king's behalf.

So the summons from the servant immediately makes them react in a peculiar way. So they decide that the only way to escape death on the battlefield, to escape this massive calamity, to escape the summons from the king is to run away to the bank of the river Gomati and play the game of chess there where nobody would spot them would kind of find out about them.

And they think that if the messenger returns again they will know that you know the messenger would know that the master is not at home and the messenger would return empty-handed. So it is a peculiar, pathetic strategy that is the crisis that happens in the story which pushes them both Mir and Mirza from the home of Mir to the banks of the river Gomati.

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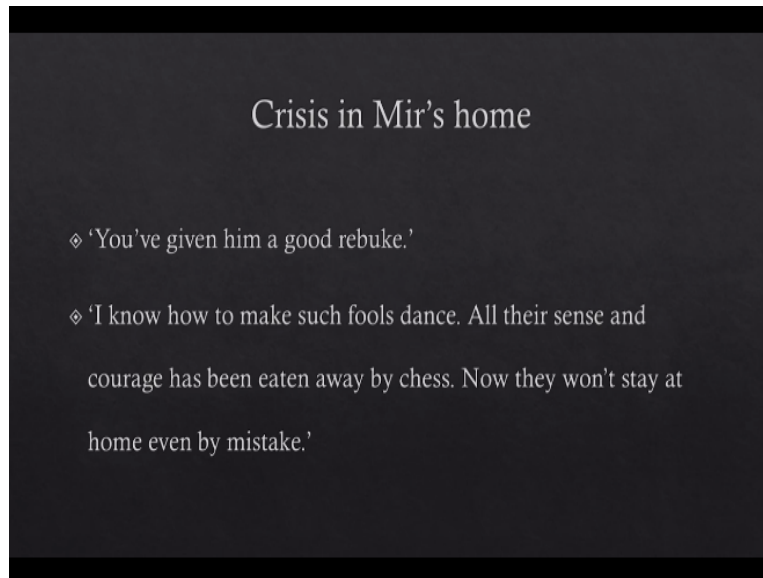
Now they say we can spread our board somewhere on a lonely spot on the bank of Gomati. Nobody will know and the fellow will return empty-handed. So this is the strategy that they devised to cheat the messenger who will return to summon them to the king's presence and this is the height of rejection of social responsibility. They have a contract with the ruler to provide troops when the ruler is in need, is in trouble and they reject that contract brazenly and that is the extent of the addiction that they have undergone.

So it is very, very tragic as well as interesting to see this reaction on the part of the aristocrats, for them the world has shrunk to this particular chessboard and nothing else matters except

the game of chess and it is also very important to note that they want to get away from civilized society, they want to be isolated from civilized society, they want to be on a lonely spot where nobody would bother them with you know troops, when no wife will trouble them, when no servants will bother them.

So they just want some isolation to enjoy that particular pleasure of the game of chess.

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Now only later we realize that this crisis that pushes Mir and Mirza away from the home is a fake crisis. It is a false crisis because we realize that the crisis has been set up by Mir's wife who is kind of having an affair with the messenger probably and she uses the messenger to rebuke the husband and send him away from home. So it is a kind of a mini play acting that has been played out for the benefit of Mir and his friend.

So the messenger/lover of Mir's wife acts as a person who has come from the king and he gives this message which can be interpreted as being true because there is political turmoil in the country at that particular point of time. So Mir and Mirza believe the story of the messenger so to speak and the messenger gets them out of the home. So this is the statement by Mir's wife.

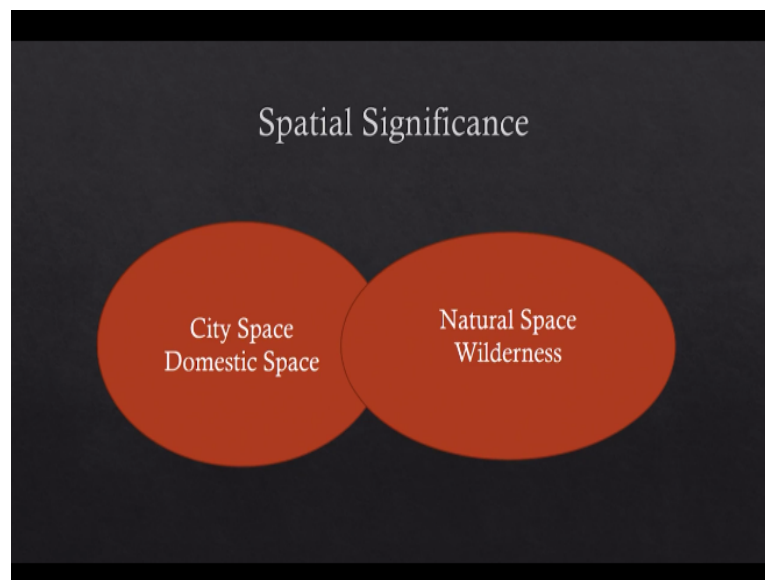
You have given him a good rebuke, good scolding, rebuke means scolding and the lover says that I know how to make such fools dance. All their sense and courage has been eaten away by chess. Now they would not stay at home even by mistake. So the arrogance if you

remember that particular attribute which is clear in the words of the messenger to the servant has its source in the fact that the messenger/lover knows that the aristocrat here is just a fool.

And he is confident enough to know that he can make this particular fool dance with a set of ideas and he also knows that all their intelligence and the courage has been eaten away, has been eradicated by their addiction or obsession with chess and he says that they would not even stay at home even by mistake which means that the ground is clear for the Begum and the lover to carry on their illicit relationship.

So it is an interesting way of getting rid of both these aristocrats from their home and the stage shifts to another location in this particular story.

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Now spatial significance is evident in this narrative in this short fiction. So we have a city space that has been corrupted by the sensual pleasures of the people of the city and accordingly the domestic space within the city is also corrupt. On the one hand, we have the Begum of Mirza who is very self-centered because all she wants is the attention of the husband.

The narrative does not give us any hint as to her other pursuit, so all day long she seems to devise strategies to get the attention of the husband. So we have one self-centered wife there and on the other hand we have Mir's wife who is completely subverting the role of the wife, the role of the loyal wife by carrying on an adulterous relationship with another man. So we

have two spaces that have been corrupted by the activities of the people who inhabit that space.

Now we have another space which is a natural space, the river Gomati is the final setting for this particular story's finale and there is a wilderness there in that particular spot, it is a lonely spot according to the two participants of the game and that is the stage for unraveling of this particular character's folly. Let us see how that happens, so we have seen some interesting strategizing of the part of Mir's wife.

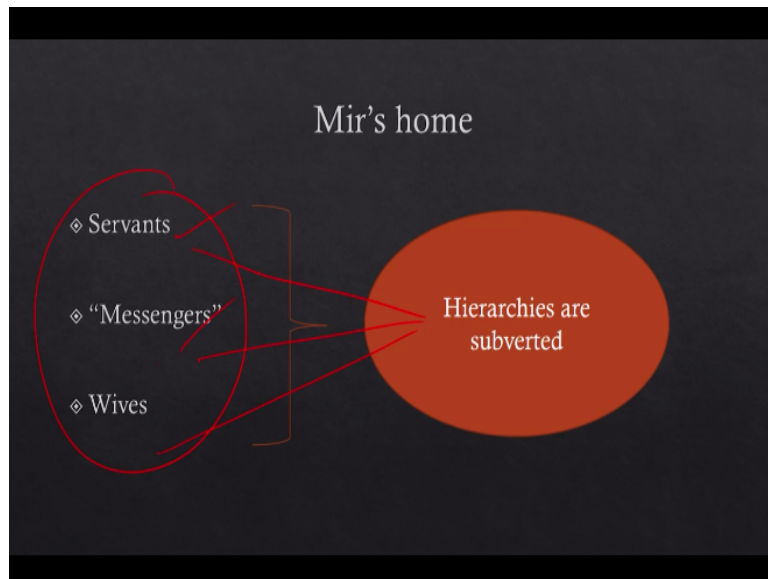
And in that particular fake crisis reveals that these two aristocrats are fools, stupid persons who cannot even verify the authenticity of the messenger or the message which has apparently come from the king.

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They are not even courageous enough to do that, they are not even brave enough to get away from the game of chess and meet this messenger from the king. So the messenger has rightly characterized them as enervated men who have no courage left and let us see if that is the case at the end of the story as well and what are the different kinds of courage that are manifested in this particular story.

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So one important point that needs to be reinforced before we move on to the finale of the story where we see the psychological climax that Premchand wants to establish in his stories we need to think about the role of the servants, the messengers and the wives in this particular story. As I said everybody is implicated, all these different categories of people are implicated in the moral corruption in the immoral epidemic that is running through the entire society.

And I call this as immoral epidemic because hierarchies are subverted, order is upturned. There is an upsetting of the social order and the servants do that, the messengers do that because they act as fake messengers and the wives do that as well because the domesticity is crumbling. Along with the crumbling of the domesticity, the social order is also crumbling because nobody is carrying out their due responsibility or their social duties.

So hierarchies are being subverted, destroyed in this particular city of Lucknow.

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Gomati River

- ◇ Deserted Mosque
- ◇ “tobacco, a chillum and wine”
- ◇ Focussed entirely on the game
- ◇ Food forgotten sometimes

Now let us come to the final setting in this story and the river is an interesting setting because it is apparently outside of the city and it is an isolated sport, a lonely sport where there is hardly any traffic of people and the two characters occupy this deserted mosque, decrepit mosque, a mosque which is no longer functioning again that is a very interesting symbol in this particular story.

The lack of functioning that is happening within a particular space which has a due purpose identified with it and these two figures carry tobacco, chillum and wine with them. Chillum is a pipe smoke tobacco and they carry all these accessories with them to the bank of the river to enjoy their games that they play continuously and every day and they are focused so entirely on this game that sometimes they even forget to eat.

So that is the extent of their obsession or addiction. So there is a subversive aspect to life that is evident through this game of chess because it is sucking out or taking away the spirit of the human beings who are playing it because they forget even to carry out the normal bodily functions of eating and sleeping and resting because they are caught in this activity.

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Chaos in Lucknow

- ◆ English Company forces invasion
- ◆ People flee to the countryside
- ◆ But our two players were unconcerned. They came out of their houses and sneaked through narrow lanes, hiding themselves from the eyes of the king's men. They wanted to enjoy the benefits from their Jagirs yielding thousands of rupees annually by doing nothing in return.

City to the countryside

So we have chaos in Lucknow, the English Company forces are invading the country and the people flee to the countryside. It is very interesting this movement from the city to the country because if you remember the story early on the wealth was taken from the country to the city and it was spent on unproductive pursuits related to finance, relating to cuisine and other things.

And now once the company forces are taking over the city when they are invading the city people move from the city to the countryside to get some help to seek the country as a heaven. While this is happening, our two players are unconcerned. They are completely unaware. They are not at all worried by this state of affairs, so this is the extract which describes there.

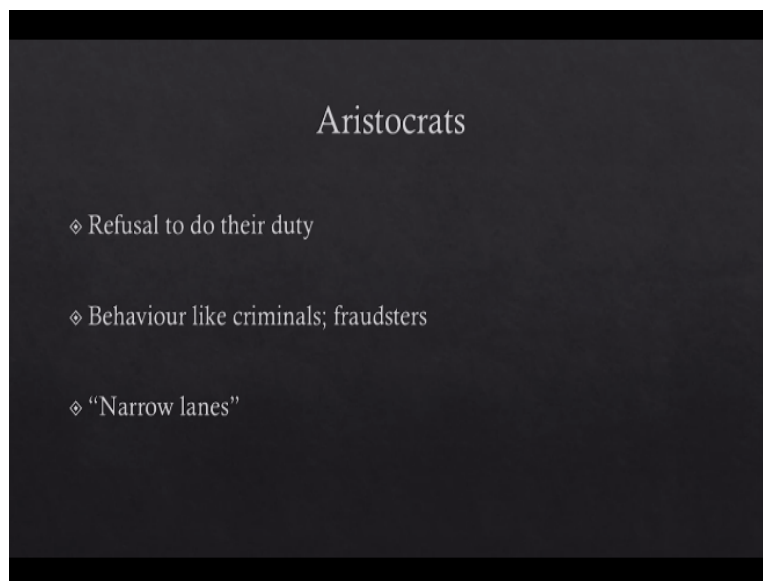
Attitude, but our two players were unconcerned they came out of their houses and sneak through narrow lanes hiding themselves from the eyes of the king's men. They wanted to enjoy the benefits from their Jagirs yielding thousands of rupees annually by doing nothing in return. So we have description of their activities and their state of mind. They completely unaffected by the army that has come into the city and they somehow, it is also very funny to see them sneaking out of their houses like thieves.

Because they want to make their getaway, they want to escape to the bank of the river Gomati so that they can play. When the entire city is falling to the clutches of the English East India Company, all they want to do is to play continue with their game. So they escape like thieves from their homes and they want to get away from the eyes of the king's soldiers as well

because they will identify them as aristocrats and also find fault with them or maybe even force them to do their part.

So they get away from the side of all these soldiers too and the narrator says this. This is the narrator's comment. They wanted to enjoy the benefits from their Jagirs yielding thousands of rupees. So they want the revenue, they want the monetary benefits but they do not offer anything in return. So that is the comment of the narrator and the narrator is very, very bitter, very sarcastic and he is criticizing these two characters openly.

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And as I said the aristocrats refused to do their duty even at a highly critical point in the state of Lucknow and they behave like criminals like thieves and fraudsters because they want to avoid the site of the king's men and that is an attitude of the criminal, they want to hide from the sight of the law and narrow lanes that is the escape route for these aristocrats, narrow lanes and that space itself is very, very symbolic.

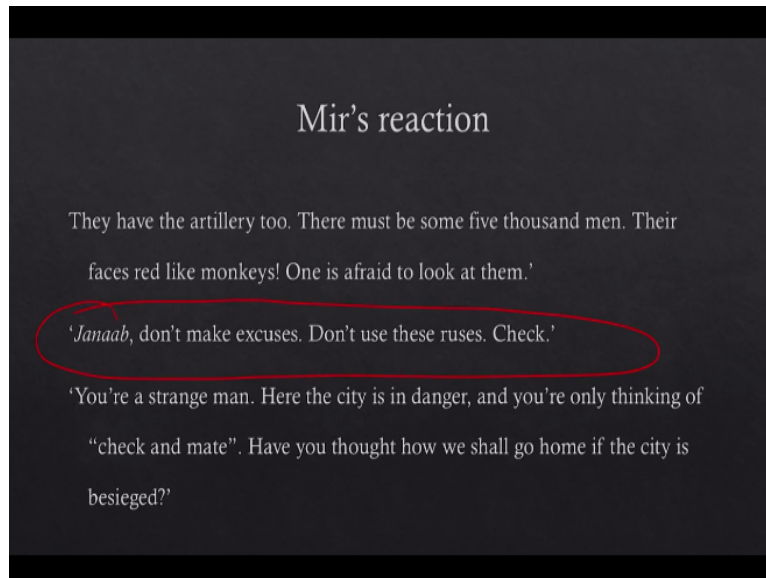
They do not use the high road; they do not use the straight road or the main road of the city instead they use the smaller lanes which is symbolic of the short cuts they take to get away from their social responsibility in order to enjoy their personal pleasure pursuits. So the game continues on the bank of the river.

And it is highly important to notice that they interest in the political turmoil that is happening in the city right then while they are playing this particular game of chess is connected to the fortunes in the chess. So if one person is losing the game, he will be interested in the political

turmoil in the city. So that is how it was and if he was winning he would not be interested in the political conflict, he would not be interested in the fall of the Nawab.

Only if he is losing he would be. So it is a very, very tragic, perspective in order to, it is very tragic to see the aristocrats react in such a manner to the political shifts that is happening in their city.

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So this is Mir's reaction to the invasion of the city and you can guess from the rule from the formula that I have just given you why he is having such a reaction, such a reaction to the occupation of the city by the English forces. They have the artillery too, they being the English Company forces. There must be some five thousand men. Their faces red like monkeys.

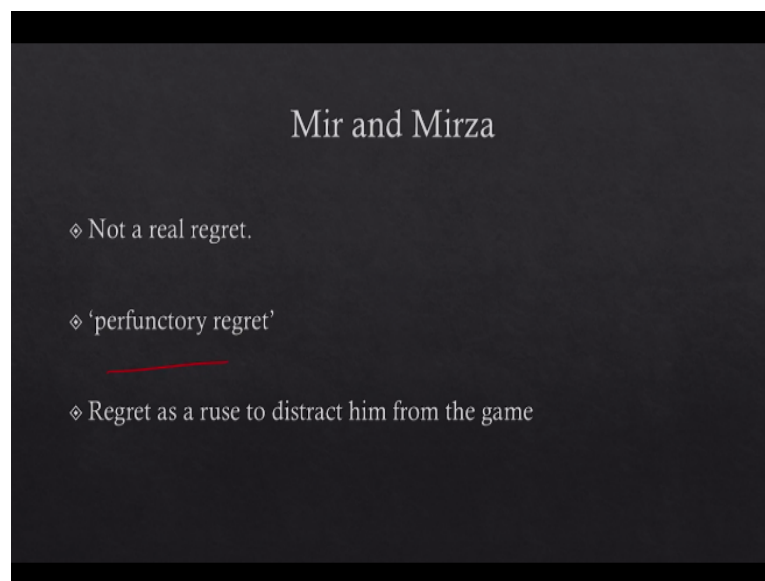
One is afraid to look at them. Janaab do not make excuses, do not use these ruses. Check. You are a strange man. Here the city is in danger and you are only thinking of check and mate. Have you thought how we shall go home if the city is besieged? So from this conversation one can safely say that Mir is on the losing side. He is losing the game of chess which is why he is interested in the ransacking of the city, in the besiege of the city by the English Company forces.

And Mirza rightly knows through this we can tell from this particular statement that Mir is trying to distract him from the game because Mir is on the losing side. He says that do not make excuses, do not use these ruses to get away from the game of chess. You are under

check and you can see the reaction of Mir again. You are a strange man. He kind of accuses Mirza for not having any kind of sympathy or emotion when the city is in danger.

And he says you are only thinking of check and mate, you are so selfish, have you thought how we shall go home and Mirza says okay will think about it when the time comes. So this reaction tells you the state of their mind and how they look at the political turmoil that is happening outside of the game of chess. Even the political turmoil is dependent on the wins and the losses that they suffer.

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So the regret that we can see on the part of Mir is not a real regret. It is a perfunctory regret, it is a superficial regret in the sense that there is no real emotion there and Mirza rightly points out that the regret is used as a ruse and excuse to distract him from the game and he does not want to do that.

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Arrest of Nawab Wajid Ali

◇ There was no commotion in the city, and no fighting. No bloodshed. Nowhere the king of a free country would have been defeated so quietly, without any bloodshed. It wasn't the kind of non-violence that would please the gods. It was a form of cowardice on which even great cowards would have shed tears. The king of a vast country like Awadh was being driven away as a prisoner, and the city of Lucknow was sleeping peacefully. This was the nether of political downfall.

There was no commotion in the city and no fighting. So this extract is about the arrest of Nawab Wajid Ali and there was no commotion in the city and no fighting. So this is the extract of the state of affairs when the city is falling to the hands of the English Company forces and the narrator is at his height of anger at these two aristocrats and he is very, very bitter because the two aristocrats have played no part and the people of the city of Lucknow have played no part in rescuing the country from the foreign forces.

So there was no commotion in the city and no fighting, no bloodshed, nowhere king of a free country would have been defeated so quietly without any bloodshed. It was not the kind of nonviolence that would please the Gods, it was a form of cowardice on which even great cowards would have shed tears. The king of a vast country like Avadh was being driven away as a prisoner and the city of Lucknow was sleeping peacefully.

This was the nether of political downfall. So there is a lot of criticism and there is a lot of bitterness on the part of the narrator about the fall of a free country. So Lucknow is somehow representing the entire country when it falls to the British East India Company and he really feels sad at the fact that there was no commotion, no noise made by the people. There was no fight, no tussle on the part of the people to save their king.

No fighting at all, people just passively gave up the power over their city. No bloodshed, so defeat was so quiet and again no bloodshed. It was completely nonviolent and this nonviolence is not appreciable, you cannot appreciate this kind of nonviolence because

people are simply giving up power to the foreign rulers and this kind of nonviolence would not please the gods.

The Gods will not be happy, this is just cowardice, the height of cowardice and he says that even great cowards would shed tears, would be unhappy at this particular state of affairs in this particular city. The king of a vast country like Avadh, Avadh was rich, it was massive but the king was driven away like a prisoner. The image of a prisoner is very, very interesting because it is a recurrent image.

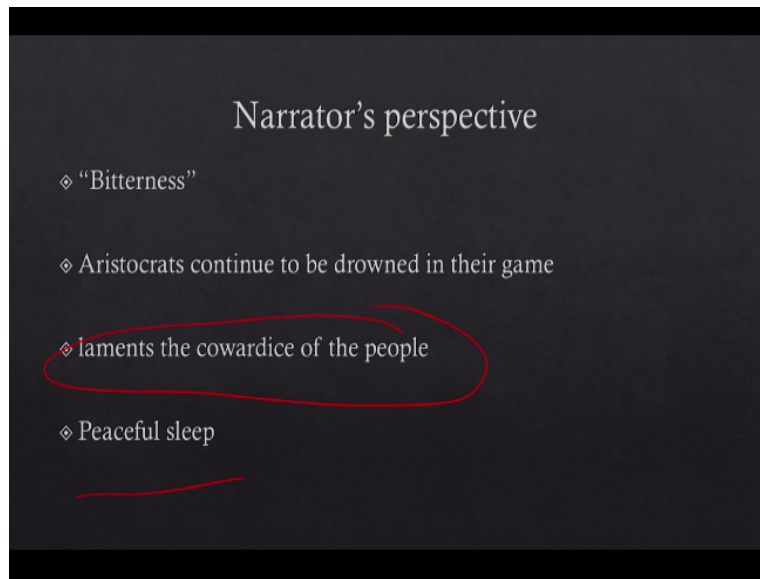
And the city of Lucknow was sleeping peacefully. Again this peace is not to be appreciated, this peace is not admirable. This was the nether of political downfall, nether means the bottom most of political downfall. So we have a political downfall in the loss of Avadh to the English forces and Premchand was criticizing the lack of activity on the part of the people. So I want to pick up on the idea of a prisoner.

We can see that the two aristocrats are also symbolic prisoners to this game of chess and the king Nawab Wajid Ali is also a prisoner to the English forces. So there is a parallel there. Everybody is a prisoner almost in this story. The wife of Mirza is a prisoner because she is obsessed with her husband's attention. So she is also a metaphoric prisoner in that regard and the other wife, the wife of Mir is also a prisoner to her adulterous relationship.

And everybody becomes a prisoner in one way or the other to the pleasures that they want to enjoy and the idea of sleeping is also very interesting because everybody is in a state of being drugged in this particular country. So there is an element of drowsiness, there is an element of being drenched, there is an element of being sunk and again the idea of being asleep when the king is being taken away like a prisoner.

It all resonates with one another, so there is a neat evocation, a strong evocation of the idea of being unconscious, subconscious and being drugged and this bottom of a political, this fall to this nether world is also very, very symbolic. This political downfall is like getting sunk in this pit of pleasure as well. So it is a passage that is deeply metaphorical as well and it is resonant but some of the images that keep recurring again and again in this particular story.

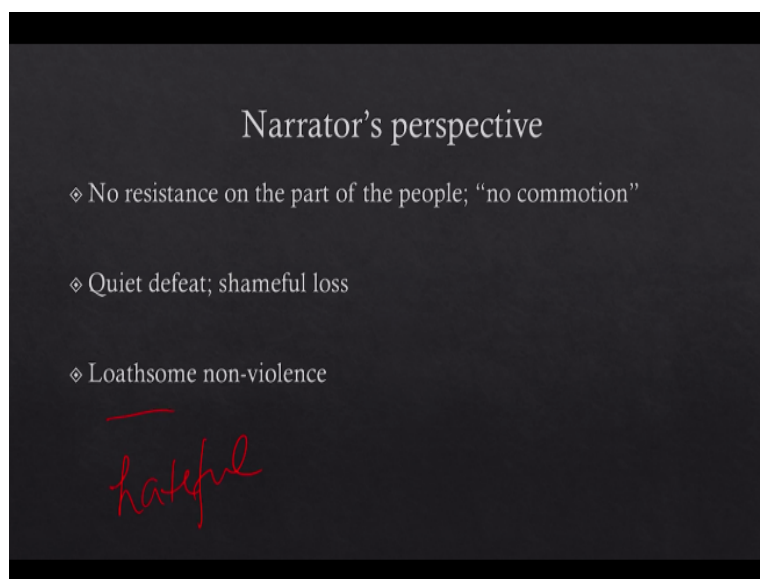
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So there is a lot of bitterness as I have pointed out and while the aristocrats are drowned in their game and while the people of Lucknow are drowned in their pleasure pursuits, the king is taken away by the English East India Company and the narrator laments the cowardice of the people. He says this is the worst form of cowardice anywhere in the world and this peaceful sleep is criticized by the narrator as well, the third person narrator as well who takes the moral high ground in this particular story.

So this is not sleep, this is being the height of passivity and the height of passivity on the part of the people who can give away the kingdom without any kind of fight to the foreign power.

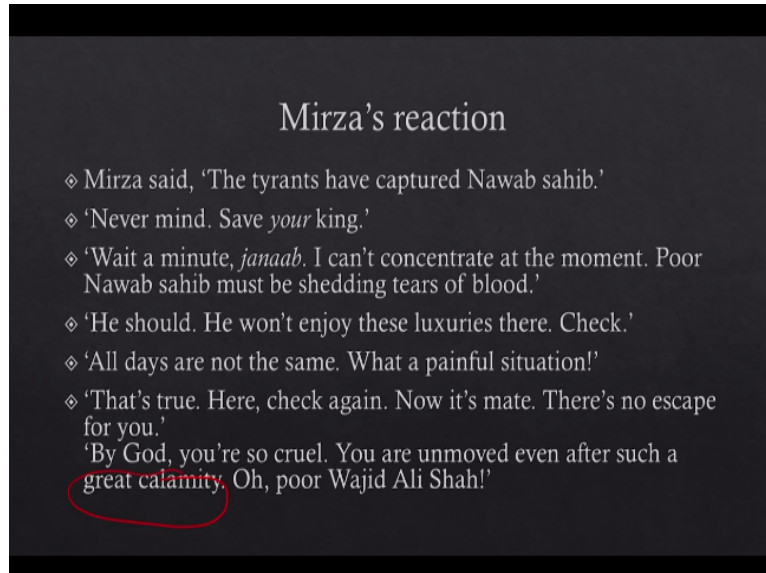
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So there is no resistance on the part of the people. They make no noise, they make no fuss and it is a quite defeat. It is a shameful loss on the part of the people where they give away

their rich and vast region of Avadh to a foreign power and as I said this known violence is loathsome, it is hateful because there is no fight, there is no brave fight put up by the people of Lucknow.

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Mirza's reaction

- ◊ Mirza said, 'The tyrants have captured Nawab sahib.'
- ◊ 'Never mind. Save *your* king.'
- ◊ 'Wait a minute, *janaab*. I can't concentrate at the moment. Poor Nawab sahib must be shedding tears of blood.'
- ◊ 'He should. He won't enjoy these luxuries there. Check.'
- ◊ 'All days are not the same. What a painful situation!'
- ◊ 'That's true. Here, check again. Now it's mate. There's no escape for you.'
- ◊ 'By God, you're so cruel. You are unmoved even after such a great calamity. Oh, poor Wajid Ali Shah!'

So now we have the reaction of Mirza and this is Mirza's reaction to the fall of Lucknow to the capture of the Nawab Sahib who is the ruler. Now you can tell from Mirza's interest in the political downfall that he is losing his game of chess, only because he is losing the game of chess he is interested in the fall of the Nawab. So Mirza said the tyrants have captured Nawab Sahib.

Never mind. Save your king says Mir. Wait a minute, Janaab. I cannot concentrate at the moment. Poor Nawab Sahib must be shedding tears of blood. He should. He would not enjoy these luxuries there. Check. All these are not the same. What a painful situation. That is true. Here check again. Now it is mate. There is no escape for you. By god, you are so cruel. You are unmoved even after such a great calamity. Oh, poor Wajid Ali Shah.

So Mirza is terribly apparently affected by the capture of Nawab Sahib and he says that Nawab Sahib must be shedding tears of blood and it is a great calamity, it is a massive calamity and this sympathy, this emotional reaction of Mirza is a nice parallel to Mir's reaction if you remember who says that have you thought how we shall go home if the city is besieged and he says the city is in danger.

There is a parallel here between these two men whose emotional reactions to the city are the same, one on the same if they are on the losing side. So they worry about the political situation only if their personal pleasure is getting disrupted, only then they react to the political conflict. It is very important to notice that the word calamity is once again evoked here.

If you remember early on they did not want to go to the battlefield because they were worried that you know they will meet a calamity, they will die on the battlefield which is why they get away to the banks of the river Gomati. So in order to avoid that calamity, apparently their lack of action is causing another calamity to the ruler of this particular state. So there are connections between their actions and the events that befall on Wajid Ali Shah.

So this scene is very, very funny as well in some sense because it is a practiced hypocrisy and we know what is coming way ahead from the way the game of chess progresses for each player.

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The slide has a dark background with white text. The title 'Climax to the Story' is centered at the top. Below it is a list of three points, each preceded by a diamond symbol. To the right of the list is a red oval containing white text.

Climax to the Story

- ◆ Hardships because of their addiction to the game
- ◆ Mirza has lost “three successive games”
- ◆ On the verge of losing the next

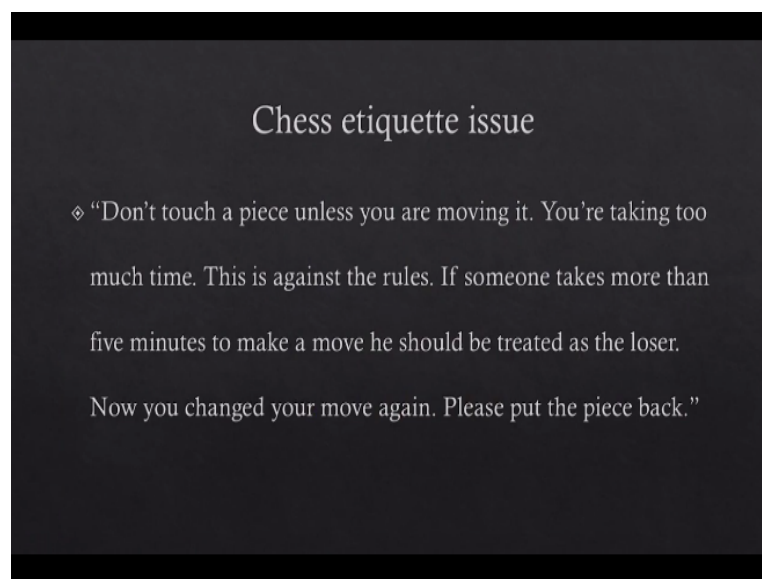
The loser picks a quarrel over “chess etiquette”

And if you look at the story as a whole we can see that the two central characters Mir and Mirza have suffered hardships because of their addiction to the game. So they have been thrown out of one home after another, they had to escape from you know messengers even if they are fake messenger they have to get away from them in order to exercise the privilege of playing the game of chess.

So they have undergone hardships because of their obsession. So that is something that we need to make note of and at this particular point of time in the story Mirza has lost three successive games. So he has lost 3 times in a row and he is not very happy and he is also on the verge of losing the next game and this brings the climax to the story. So the actual climax to the story is not related to the fall, the nether of political downfall that Lucknow and the state of Avadh suffers.

But it is related to the loss of game on the part of one particular player called Mirza and the loser Mirza picks up a quarrel over chess etiquette because he is constantly losing, he is deeply unhappy and he finds fault with a particular chess etiquette where Mir takes a lot of time to make a move and that angers Mirza and he says do not touch a piece unless you are moving it, you are taking too much time.

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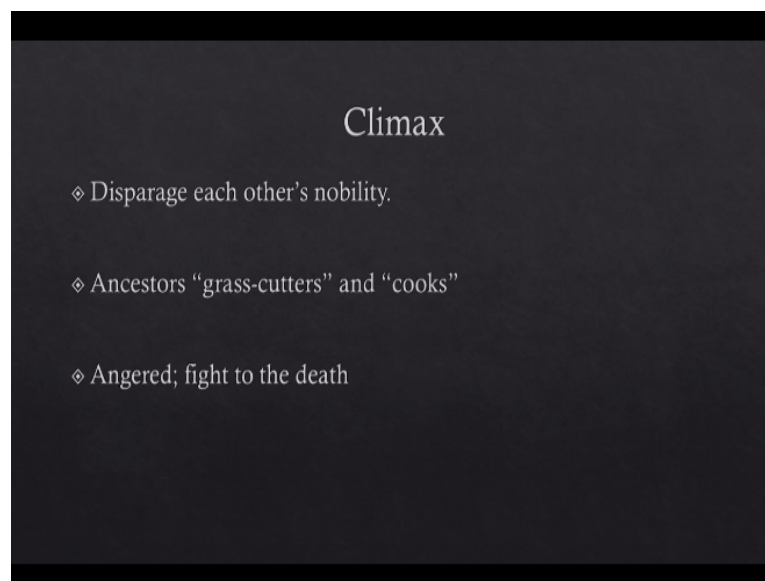
This is against the rules, if someone takes more than 5 minutes to make a move he should be treated as a loser, now you change and move again, please put the piece back. So the idea of winning and losing and the rules of the game are significant on two levels. On one level, it is affecting the chance of winning for a particular player, it is Mirza in this particular context and he is unhappy because Mir is not following the etiquette of the game of chess.

He says you are taking too much time and that is affecting my chances of winning the game. This is the first level. There is another level the metaphoric level where they talk about winners and losers and where there is a greater loser here, the Nawab is a greater loser here,

the people of Lucknow is the greater loser here and the people of the entire country are again losers to the British East India Company.

That idea is completely forgotten by these two players who are worried about the winners and losers of this particular game which has no connection, no relationship to the real political world and they do not even realize that when they go home, they will go home to enslaved homes though that idea is not you know having any impact on the minds of the two players. So they worried about this you know rules of the game.

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So as a result of this fight over chess etiquette, they disparage each other's nobility, so they get down to that position where they throw disparaging remarks at each other's ancestors and ancestry and one says that your ancestor was a grass-cutter and the other says that your ancestor was a cook and this the meaning remarks against each other's lineage angers them and it is an anger that they take to fighting physically and it is a fight to their death and that is very, very interesting.

So it is a fight that kind of begins as a squabble over the rules of the game and it really moves to a different level where they insult each other's lineage and finally they take to their swords to protect their honor, the honor which they think is being stained by the other's remarks and they fight a battle in which they die.

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Psychological Climax

◇ Both the friends drew their swords from their hips. It was the age of chivalry. Everyone was equipped with a sword or a dagger. Both friends were pleasure-loving but no cowards. They had become devoid of political will. Why should they die for kings or kingdoms? But they were not deficient in personal courage. Both of them fought on, and fatally wounded, died writhing in pain. They who could not spare a single drop of tear for their king died defending their vazirs on the chessboard.

So both the friends drew their swords from their hips, it was the age of chivalry. Everyone was equipped with a sword or a dagger. Both friends were pleasure-loving but no cowards. They had become devoid of political will. Why should they die for kings or kingdoms but they were not deficient in personal courage? Both of them fought on and fatally wounded, died writhing in pain.

They who could not spare a single drop of tear for their king died defending their vazirs on the chessboard. Again this is a passage which is a full of irony and anger on the part of the narrator about the behaviour of these two cowards and he is very ironical when he says that this is the age of chivalry and this is the activities of these two aristocrats who do not fight for their king.

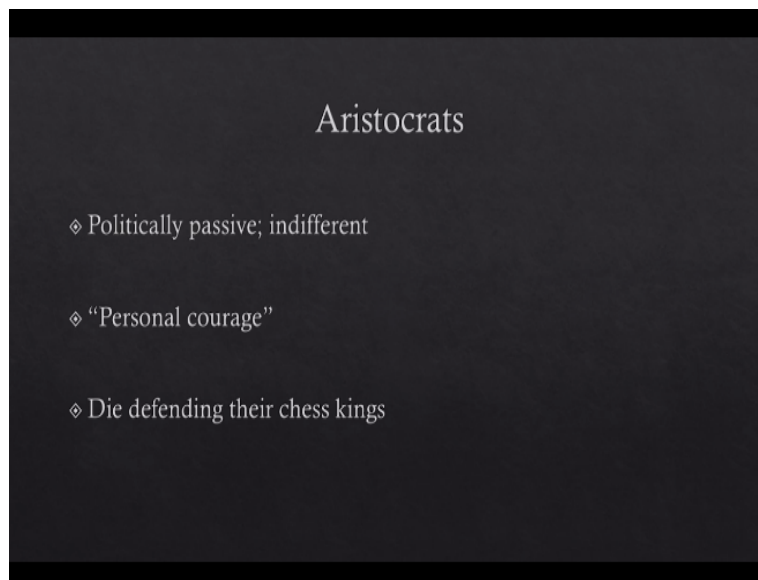
That is the right code of chivalry, if they had fought for their king then we can rightly say that these two aristocrats have been chivalrous in protecting the king and the realm but they do not do that, they kind of fight for the honor of one another, they fight for their egos, they fight for their personal honor and everyone was equipped in those days with a sword or a dagger and both the friends were pleasure-loving but no cowards.

Again this particular statement is slightly ironical again because they are cowards in some sense because they do not have the courage to go and meet the messenger, they do not have the courage to go to the battlefield, they do not have the courage to organize troops who could fight against the English East India Company but they are also not cowards because they can draw their swords and fight against one another.

So there are different kinds of courage here which should be noticed. It is a courage that will only kind of come to play if their personal honor or ego is in question. They had become devoid of political will, they do not worry about political issues, they are politically indifferent but they are not personally indifferent. They are very much worried about their egos.

And the narrator asks rhetorically why should they die for the kings or kingdoms but and they were not defecation in personal courage and they fight fatally and they die for their vazirs in the game of chess not for the real vazirs not for the real king on the battlefield. In fact, they die for these chess pieces which have no spirit or life within them. So they fight for this virtual game and for the honor which seems to be affected because of this particular game.

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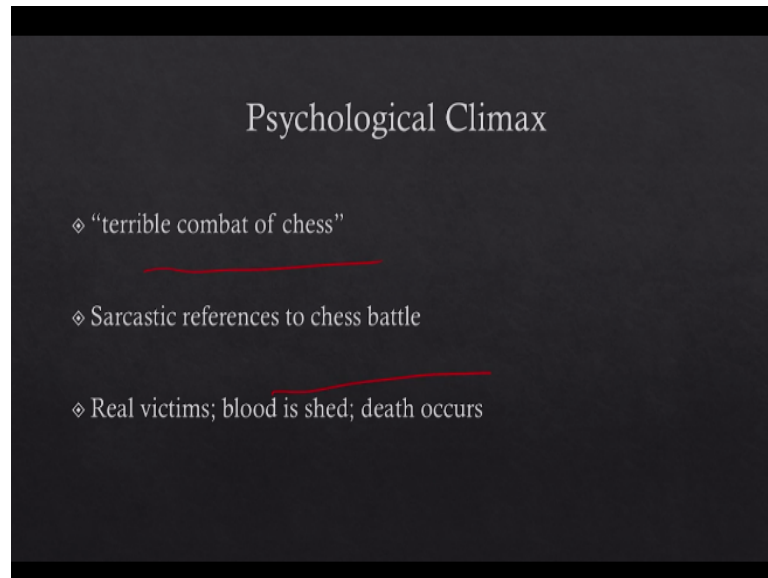
So it is a psychological climax and Premchand does achieve his theory of the short story in this particular story where he brings out the incidence to point out a particular insight about characters in this story and he brings that to the height of critical point when these two aristocrats die over a game of chess. The entire life is obsessed by this game of chess and the entire life is cut off because of this game of chess.

So they are politically passive, they are indifferent but their personal courage is made evident through this game of chess as well. It is almost like Don Quixote in the Indian context where they fight an enemy who is not a real enemy. The real enemy is the English East India

Company who has taken over the kingdom but they fight each other as they are fighting an enemy.

So they die defending the chess kings when the real king has been imprisoned by the English East India Company when the real king has been taken prisoner. They are worried about their chess kings and they fight to save chess kings and vazirs.

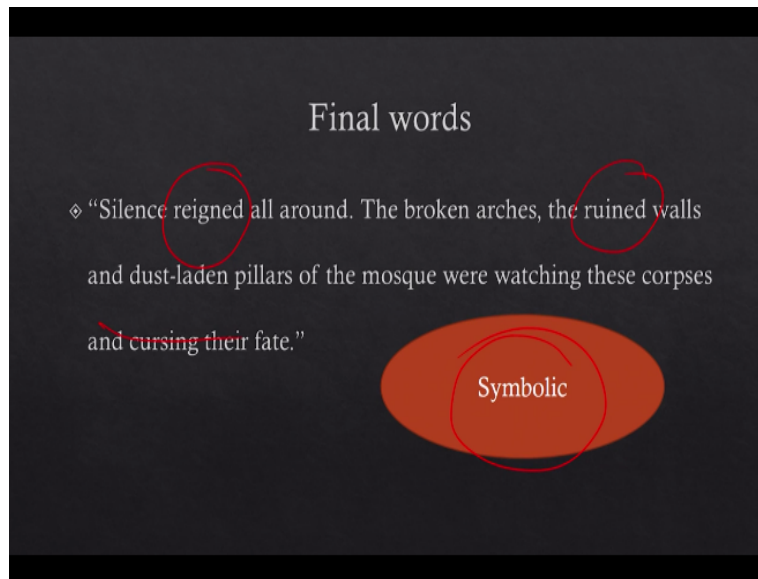
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So this psychological climax points out several things which we need to think about while the narrator did talk about the terrible combat of chess, the terrible fight of chess while the narrator did make references to chess battles, this alternative battle, the symbolic battle does become a real battle at the end when we have real victims. The two aristocrats become real victims, their blood is shed, real death happens.

So from a metaphorical plane, we have come to a real plane where there is an impact on the real life of the aristocrats because of their obsession to pleasures of the game of chess.

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And this is the final statement in the story, the final set of ideas and the narrators says silence reigned all around, silence ruled all around. Everything was quiet, it seems to suggest that just as a city is sleeping when the king has been taken prisoner, the entire region has been silenced, silence is the one that is doing the ruling here. The broken arches, the ruined walls, the dust-laden pillars of the mosque were watching these corpses and cursing their fate.

The decrepit mosque if you remember this is a rundown mosque and the mosque seems to be watching these two figures, the dead bodies of these two figures and they seem to be cursing their fortunes and here we have a kind of an anthropomorphic effect at the end of the story when the buildings themselves seem to may comment on the activities of the two players who have lost their life because of this obsession to this game of chess.

And that game of chess is symbolic of the range of pleasures which have corrupted the people, the populous of this rich city of Lucknow which has fallen to the clutches of the English East India Company. So that seems to be the major theme of the story and that is symbolically and structurally presented in *The Chess Players* by Premchand in a masterful fashion. Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.