

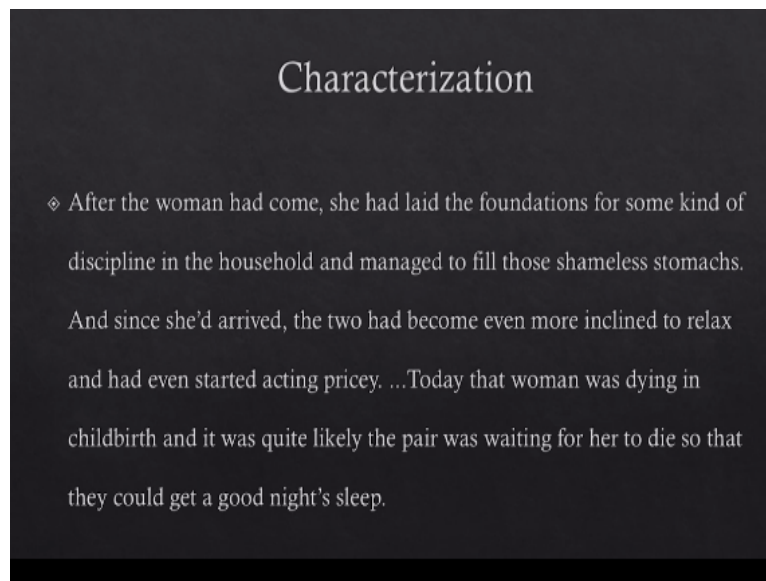
**Short Fiction in Indian Literature**  
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**Lecture – 07A**  
**Psychological Climax in Premchand's The Shroud (Continued 1)**

Hello and welcome back to this lecture on the Psychological Climax in Premchand's The Shroud. This session is a continuation of the previous one and towards the close of the previous session, we were talking about the relationship between the two men, the central characters and Budhiya and how this analysis of the relationship shows the philosophy of life adopted by Madhav and Ghisu in their village.

So we are going to analyse the relationship closely to see why they act in the way they act in the story and this is the narrator's perspective on the presence of the woman in the household of Ghisu and Madhav.

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After the woman had calm, she had laid the foundations for some kind of discipline in the household and managed to fill those shameless stomachs and since she had arrived, the two had become even more inclined to relax and had even started acting pricey. Today that woman was dying in childbirth and it was quite likely the pair was waiting for her to die so that they could get a good night sleep.

So the narrator neatly sums up the attitude of the two men towards the woman who had come to them and she kind of lays the foundation for a home, the words are very, very interesting, laid the foundation for some kind of discipline and she seems to create the domestic setup from scratch for them and she also managed to feed them regularly and which is why the word shameless stomachs is pretty interesting.

They shamelessly exploit the woman who has come to them and without giving anything in return and the narrator says that ever since she had come to their family, they had started to act in a very, very superior fashion, in fact they ask for double wages if somebody ask them to come and work.

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The slide has a dark grey background. At the top center, the title "Domesticity and Ingratitude" is written in a white serif font. Below the title, there is a list of three bullet points, each starting with a white diamond symbol. To the right of the list is a large red circle containing the text "Construction of domesticity" in white.

Domesticity and Ingratitude

- ◆ Budhiya brings order into the family
- ◆ Feeds them
- ◆ The men act in a superior fashion ("double wages").

Construction of domesticity

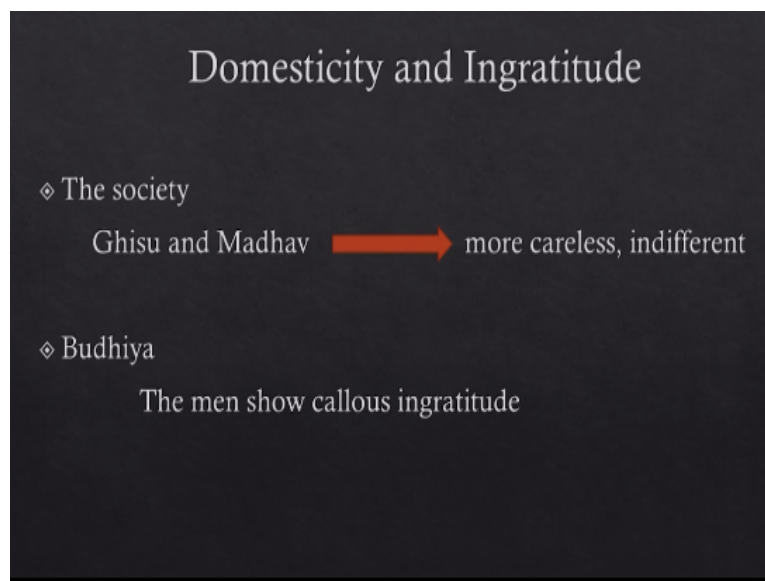
So the presence of the woman is very interesting as it creates a domestic structure for the two men and the creation of domesticity itself seems to grant these two men some kind of superior status in society and the narrator mocks that attitude. He says that they started to act pricey and despite getting a lot of benefit through Budhiya, despite getting a home, despite getting regular food because she is working for them.

Despite all this, they did not pay back Budhiya when she is in a very, very critical situation and the narrator says that it was quite likely the pair was waiting for her to die soon, so that they can go back to sleep. So the narrator is very, very judgemental and in fact quite rightly so because that is what actually they really want in terms of Budhiya's condition. If you recall the previous session, Madhav says why does not she die quickly, so that you know she can put an end to her suffering.

But the subtext to that wish is that he wants her to die because they can go back to eating the potatoes that they are roasting outside the hut and then they can go to sleep. So we have two human beings, who do not want anybody to intervene, to disrupt their lifestyle even though that particular woman who is disrupting their lifestyle is a woman who has looked after them for a long time.

So, we have the idea of domesticity and we have the idea of ingratitude that is revealed through the domestic setup of Ghisu and Madhav.

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So through that domestic setup the narrator shows how ungrateful Ghisu and Madhav are, so that ingratitude is callous, it is very, very harsh, it is supremely harsh especially in relation that particular moment in Budhiya's life and even in relationship with the rest of the society, Ghisu and Madhav become more careless and more indifferent once their domestic setups becomes more disciplined through the presence of Budhiya.

So the point that I am trying to make here that through a particular setup the attitude of the two men become clear, you know the greater they are comfort, the more indifferent that they become towards the society to which they need to contribute to become productive, responsible citizens in a village.

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## Madhav

- ◇ Madhav was afraid that, if he went into the hut, Ghisu would grab a larger share of the potatoes. He said, 'I'm scared to go in there.'
- ◇ 'What's there to be scared of ? I'm right here.'
- ◇ So why don't you go and see, then?'

So, we need to recall that particular scene, where the two men are outside the hut and Budhiya is inside suffering and the men they are roasting potatoes on a fire that they have lit and then they have to go check in because Budhiya is shrieking in pain, but then nobody is willing to go inside the hut to check because they worried that the other person will get a largest share of the potatoes.

So this is the conversation that is happening between the father and the son. Madhav was afraid that if he went into the hut, Ghisu would grab a larger share of the potatoes. He said I am scared to go in there, what is there to be scared of I am right here. So why do not you go and see then. So the father says what is there to be scared, just go and check in on her and the son responds by saying why do not you go and do that then.

The point is these two men do not want to leave the potatoes and go and check because they are worried that they will get a smaller portion of the food, so food is at the heart of the problems in this particular story and that needs to be analysed in a detailed manner. So the satisfaction of hungry becomes the primary motive for these two men in terms of their behavior, not only towards Budhiya, but to the rest of the society.

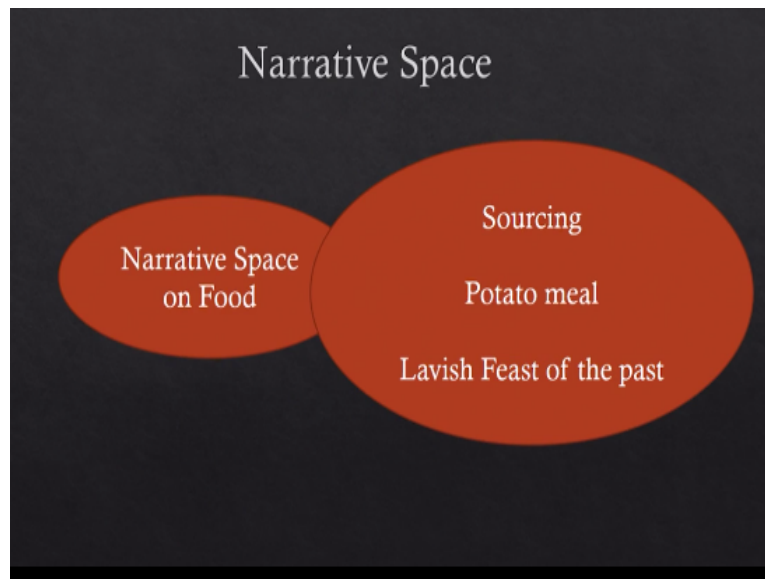
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## Characterization

- ◊ Satisfaction of hunger becomes primary
- ◊ Death of a relative, a wife and a daughter-in-law, becomes secondary.

So appeasing their hunger is primary rather than look after a relative, a wife, a daughter-in-law who is suffering terribly at a really critical point in a life especially during child birth and that situation becomes secondary. So that tells us something about these two men that is that their life has been one of prolonged starvation, prolonged starvation does terrible things to a psyche and that is manifested through the behavior of Ghisu and Madhav.

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So if we look at the narrative closely, one thing becomes clear and that is that the narrator spends a lot of time thinking about describing food. So there is a lot of expenditure of time and energy on the idea of food and how it sourced and what are the different kind of food that they get to eat and what are the incidence that surround the eating of a meal and especially there is a good and big paragraph on the lavish feast that Ghisu enjoyed in his past.

So this attitude to food has a thematic significance that the readers need to make note of. So if you take a good look at the beginning of the story when Budhiya is suffering.

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## Potato Meal

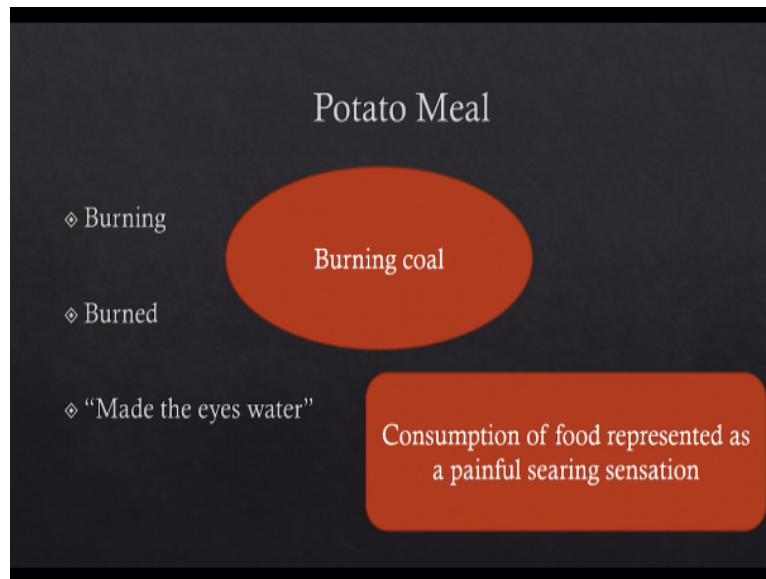
◇ “When it was peeled, the outer part of the potato did not seem that hot but, as soon as it was bitten into, the inner part burned the tongue, the throat and the palate. Instead of holding that burning coal in one's mouth, it seemed wiser to send it down as soon as possible so it could cool down in the stomach. That's why they were swallowing so quickly, although the effort made their eyes water.”

The other thing that is happening is the roasting of the potatoes outside the hut, and it is that preoccupation that occupation of roasting and eating the food that prevents these two men from going into look after Budhiya who needs help and again the idea of food is repeatedly mentioned and their preoccupation about the hunting for food is described at good length in the narrative.

So this is the portion about the way in which the potato meal is prepared by the two men and it has a lot of symbolic significance which is why I am going to read this extract now for you. When it was peeled, when the potato was peeled, the outer part of the potato did not seem that hot, but as soon as it was bitten into, the inner part burned the tongue, the throat and the palate. Instead of holding that burning coal in one's mouth, it seemed wiser to send it down as soon as possible so that it could cool down in the stomach.

That is why they were swallowing so quickly, although the effort made their eyes water.” It is very painful, that is very clear eating of this potato meal is hurting these two men, but they do not care, the point is to swallow it as quickly as possible, so that the potato can go down into their stomachs and then cool there and get cool there. So it is a very, very disturbing idea in terms of the process and the notion of eating.

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Let us see what they are, so the words burning, burnt made the eyes water in this particular extract is very, very crucial because it creates a particular mood, a particular tone, so that it could cool down in the stomach and the effort made their eyes water, the effort of eating made their eyes water. So it is a searing emotion that is the word that comes to my mind, it is a searing feeling, eating becomes a very, very painful visceral process as we can see here and we need to remember that while they are doing there is someone who is dying.

Who is making blood-curdling shrieks, so it creates a very animalistic atmosphere as well that you can be blind to someone's agony and pain while you are eating and that process of eating itself is becoming painful for the persons who are doing that activity. So there is a lot of symbolism there and food is compared to burning coal. That is a very interesting metaphor. Coal is someone that burns that is very, very hot and food is compared to that.

And that burning coal is swallowed by these two men metaphorically and as I said this consumption of food is represented in the narrative as a painful and searing sensation and that can be symbolic of these two figures, who are occupying the lowest of the low in terms of the social ladder and for them sourcing these foods and consuming the food can become such a painful activity.

And that does not mean that they have no culpability in terms of the painful condition that they undergo. Okay, again so we have the potato meal which is happening while Budhiya is dying and then after that Ghisu thinks back to a feast of the past that he enjoyed and this is the feast that one of the landlords gave to the village people during his daughter's wedding.

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## Feast of the Past

◆ Ghisu thought back to a landlord's wedding feast that he had been to twenty years ago. The contentment he had felt at that feast was worth remembering for a lifetime and, even today, the memory was fresh. He said, 'I'll never forget that meal. I've never eaten that kind of food—or that much of it—ever again. The girl's family fed everyone as many puris as they could eat. Everyone. The rich, the poor—everyone ate those puris.'

And there is a lot of narrative effort in describing the different items of food that was given during that feast and how everybody had a great time be it the rich or the poor and they had a lot of food that they more than they can eat and this scene becomes a scene of a fantasy for Ghisu who goes back to that event and re-lives it for the benefit not only for his psyche, but also for his son Madhav.

Ghisu thought back to a landlords wedding fees that he had been to 20 years ago. The contentment he had felt at that feast was what remembering for a lifetime and even today the memory was fresh. He said I will never forget that meal, I have never eaten that kind of food or that much of it every again, the girl's family fed everyone as many puris as they could eat everyone the rich, the poor, everyone ate those puris.

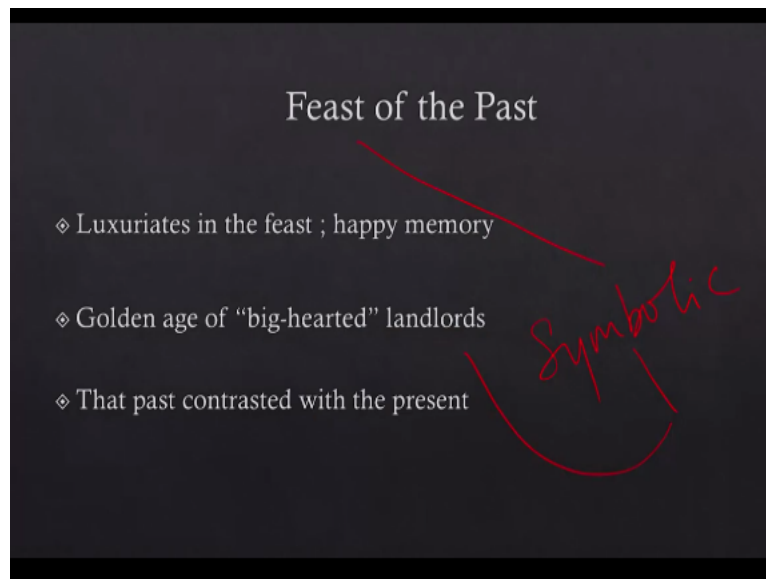
So it is a very interesting and significant image to revisit a memory because it becomes very special for you that is when mostly people revisits certain things that happened in the past and for these two men and particularly for Ghisu, he revisits this past because that one gave him a satisfaction for a lifetime, he says that that feast was worth remembering for a lifetime and even today the memory was fresh and it is fresh because he is continuously starving as the story suggests.

And he says I will never forget that meal, so there is a sort of luxuriating in that particular feast, the memory itself is a luxury for Ghisu and it is a happy memory that he goes back to



time and again and there is a sense that that feast is symbolic of the character of the landlords who seem to occupy some sort of golden age or golden age of generosity.

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So there is this generosity that is manifested through the feast that is given to the entire society be it you know the rich or the poor or the middling classes and that rich past the past of the feast is contrasted with the present in the mind of Ghisu because the present is a kind of a barren present in terms of satisfying meals and the story is very, very clear in giving us that contrast, because the present is about an obsession with food and the bare food the really Spartan meals that these two men get by with on a daily basis.

And that contrast is especially interesting because it has a narrative function to serve in this particular story and Ghisu says now everyone is counting pennies.

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## The Present

- ◇ “Now everyone’s counting pennies—don’t spend on weddings, don’t spend on religious festivals. Ask them, where will they stash all the money they take from the poor? There’s no problem stashing the money, but when it comes to spending, then they think of thrift”

Do not spend on weddings, do not spend on religious festivals, ask them where will they stash all the money they take from the poor. There is no problem stashing the money, but when comes to spending then the think of thrift. So the present is a present of thrift when people do not spend on all these special occasions, be it weddings or religious festivals and Ghisu for the first time asks this question where is the money that they take from the poor.

Where have they hidden it and it is only when they come to spending that money that they think about saving it, so there is hardly any money to be spend on the society for the benefit of the poor. So this extract is crucial because it is one of the extracts that gives us a sense of Ghisu's point of view.

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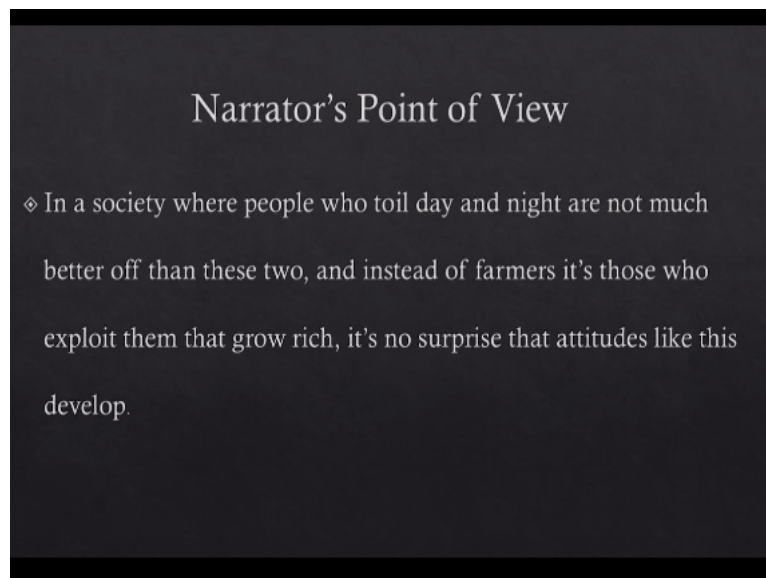
## Ghisu’s Point of View

- ◇ About the nature of the landlords
- ◇ Extortion of money from the poor
- ◇ Their apparent thriftiness

And he is not a man who does not have a good understanding of the functions of society. He does have a very good understanding of the way the society functions, the nature of the landlords and he also has this conviction that money is extorted from the poor on the part of the rich, the landlords and instead of returning it to the poor through all these occasions of festivity, personal and religious, they save those moneys and that thriftiness on the part of the landlords is what offends the psyche of men like Ghisu.

And we can get also a sense that the narrator is also endorsing Ghisu's perspective at certain moments in the story and that is to be recognized because the narrator does not offer a one-sided and bleak perspective about Ghisu and Madhav.

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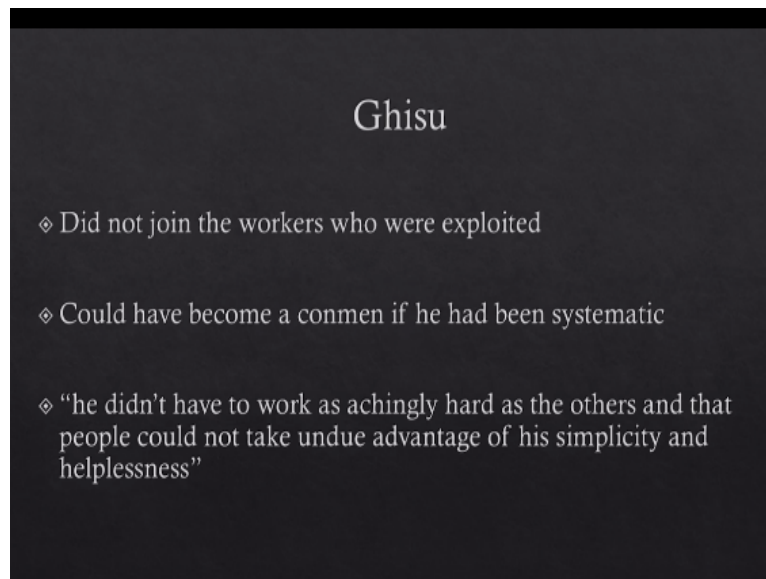


The narrator has an understanding of why these two characters behave in the fashion that they do, why are they so careless, why are they so harsh and what are the motivations in society, what are the ways in which the society has conditioned them to behave in a particular way. So the narrator is also clear about those aspects and that clarity is clear in certain moments in the story and this is one particular moment where it is very clear that the narrator kind of sees the rationale of these two men and this is the comment.

In a society where people who toil day and night are not much better off than these two and instead of farmers it is those who exploit them that grow rich, it is no surprise that attitudes like this develop. So the narrator arrives at a conclusion of his or her own in terms of why attitude such as Ghisu's and Madhav's have developed in society and he points out some of

the factors that make Ghisu and Madhav behave in such a harsh manner towards the rest of the people in their world.

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So he says that Ghisu and Madhav they do not join the people who toil day and night, they do not join that community of workers and in comparison between these two people who toil day and night, these two men Ghisu and Madhav are better off why because at the end of the day despite all the hard work that the workers do, they are not better off than Ghisu and Madhav, they seem to be on the same level ground despite all the hard work that the workers do and commit for the benefit of the rich.

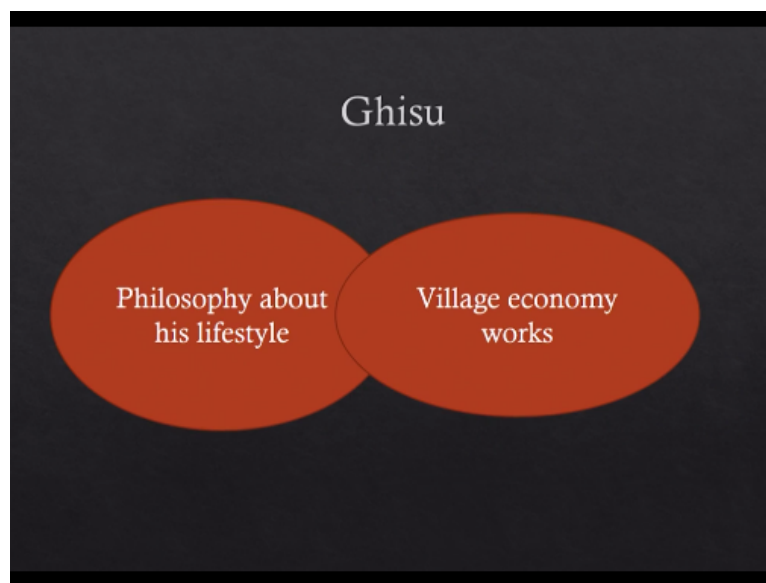
So, in hindsight it appears as if Ghisu is the smarter among the workers. He does not commit to the system and yet he is on the same level playing ground with the rest of the workers. So the narrator also suggest that Ghisu could have become a conmen and even a village headman because he has that mental capacity for becoming the head of a village or a conmen if he had been systematic.

Since he is not systematic and since he is not disciple, Ghisu does not achieve those positions of power and influence in society and the narrator says he did not have to work as achingly hard as the others and that people could not take undue advantage of his simplicity and helplessness. So as I said, Ghisu does not work like the rest of the men in his village because at the end of the day Ghisu will not be wealthy or comfortable.

Such hard work will not result in any kind of material advantage and that is clear when he looks at the rest of the workers because they are not better off than him and if he does not participate in that village economy, he would also not be exploited by the others, look at the phrase undue advantage, the village landlords will not take advantage of Ghisu. So once he is outside of that system, Ghisu is safe from that exploitation.

So we can see some kind of rationale being built up through the narrative and through the thought process of Ghisu, which the narrator offers for our benefit. So he says that it is Ghisu since he does not participate he is safer and nobody is exploiting him.

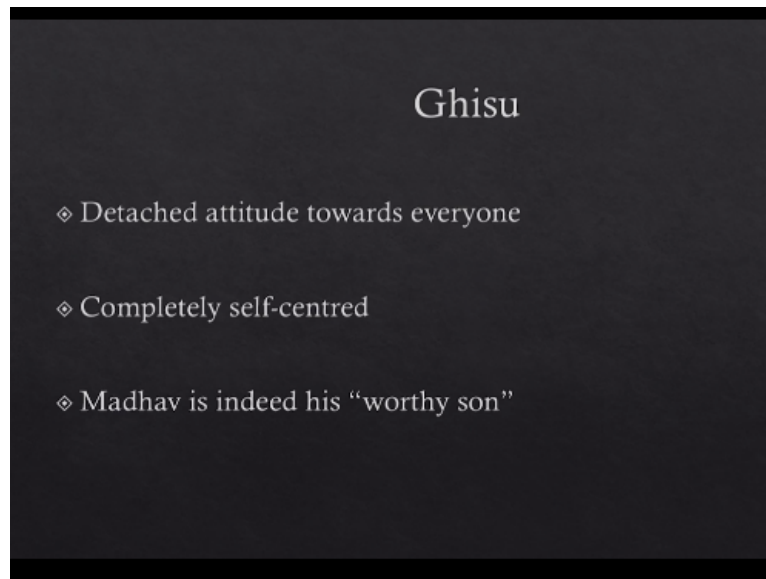
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So we do get a sense about the philosophy of Ghisu about his lifestyle and we also understand how the village economy works where most of the workers work really hard, achingly hard that is a very interesting phrase, achingly hard, painfully hard and despite such hard work there is no material improvement in the condition of the workers. So Ghisu has a good understanding of that and he stays out of that system.

He is on the margins along with his son, Madhav and they are very clear that they are not being exploited by the system because they are not participating in it.

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So this is the reason for Ghisu's detached attitude towards everyone and this was also the reason for his self-centered behavior and not only towards the rest of the society, but also towards his daughter-in-law and perhaps even towards his son and Madhav who picks up from his father is indeed a worthy son because he has learned really well from his father and he has improved even upon the father's attitude.

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So, this is the context for the behavior of Ghisu and Madhav on this particular winter night outside the hut when they are roasting potatoes, while the wife of Madhav is dying and to just digress a little bit here, it is important to note that we do not get any flashbacks about Ghisu's family in terms of his wife, in terms of his other sons whose presence is briefly referenced in the narrative.

So when he fantasizes, it is a fantasy about the food that he ate at a landlords wedding feast rather than about his family which consisted of his wife and the other sons. Madhav is the only remaining son and it is his narrative along with his father that occupies the center stage of this particular story world. Now to come back to his particular scene where they are outside this hut and eating potatoes.

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This is the actions, the behavior that they do before falling asleep while the wife is dying. They ate the potatoes, drank some water, curled up, covered themselves with their dhotis and fell asleep right there by the embers, like two enormous pythons that had eaten their fill. So they eat and they curl up, cover themselves with their dhotis with their waist cloth and they fell asleep like pythons, pythons are very, very interesting symbol.

It is an idea that the pythons crush their prey to death is kind of foremost in our minds when we read this particular phrase, enormous pythons, so they seem to almost crush the life out of Budhiya by exploiting her all along and then leaving her to die. So this is something that we need to keep in mind in terms of the animal imaginary that appears in the story. So it is almost animalistic behavior, very primitive behavior again.

Apart from food there are no other considerations and that is highlighted in this particular extract, so the humanity is erased, they become animal like, they become python like in the way they extract the maximum out of their prey and the prey here is Budhiya and they fall asleep once their hunger pangs are satisfied.

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## Crisis

- ◇ Budhiya dies
- ◇ The father and son duo wail
- ◇ The villagers console
- ◇ Significant need : Money to buy the shroud, and wood

So the female character dies, Budhiya dies when they are sleeping at night and the father and son promptly when they get up and realized that she is dead, they wail and they cry and the village has come to console them as they do preferentiality and because that is customary they console them and despite all this their worry is about the money, their significant need of the hour is the money to buy the shroud, the wood for the funeral activities.

So what they do is they go running to the landlord who is the source of the money in the village.

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## Crisis

- ◇ Landlord is the source of money
- ◇ “one who can’t stand the sight of them”
- ◇ “Beaten them...often”

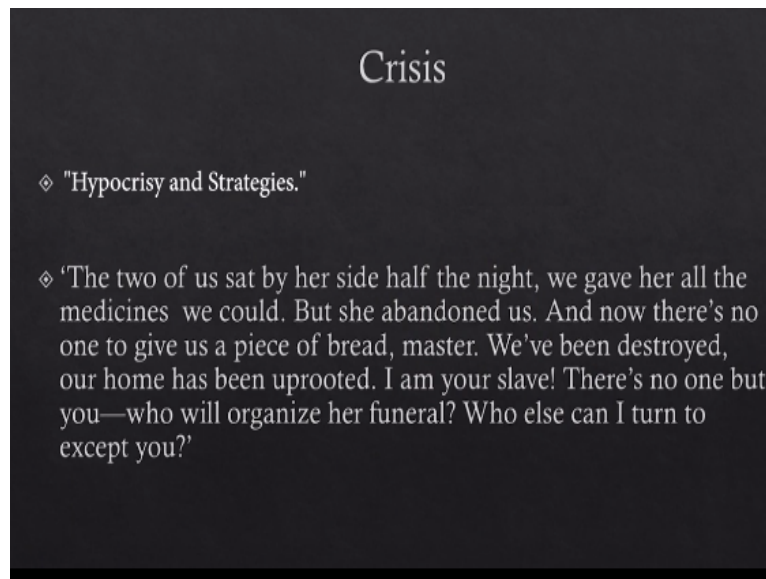
Ghisu is  
clever in his  
assessment

And it is a very interesting narrative between the landlord and Ghisu, who approaches him for money and the narrator says that the landlord cannot stand the site of them, he really dislikes the pair of them and in fact the narrator says that he has beaten them quite often, despite all



this history Ghisu is smart enough and shrewd enough to know that if he goes to the landlord at this particular moment he will get the money so he goes there.

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So and he offers the narrative that is customary again, so that cliché narrative is offered to the landlord on the part of Ghisu and this is the particular narrative and we can see the hypocrisy and the strategies that he develops in his particular narrative. “The two of us sat by his side half the night, we gave her all the medicines we could, but she abandoned us and now there is no one to give us a piece of bread, master.

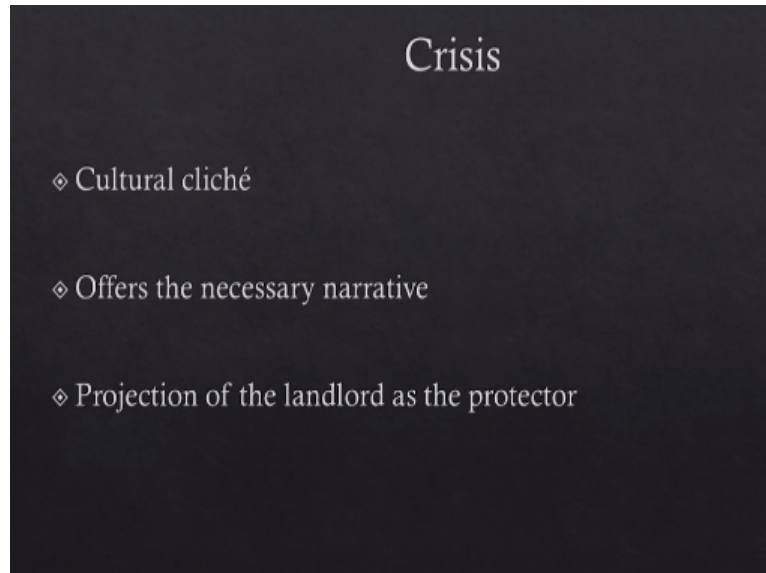
We have been destroyed, our home has been uprooted. I am your slave, there is no one, but you who will organize her funeral? Who else can I turn to except you?” So this is the perfect cliché to suggest that the wife had abandoned us, in fact the opposite is the truth, this is a cultural cliché that the death has abandoned the present, in fact the death has abandoned the living when the living did not do anything to save the person who was dying.

But then we know that this is the necessary narrative, which will get the money for Ghisu and Madhav and the hypocrisy is quite clear here. They say that the two of us sat by her side half the night, which was not the case, they sat outside of the hut eating while she was dying and they say gave her all the medicines we could, which again was not true at least that is what the narrative tells us.

And it is the combination of falsehood and cultural cliché and the right amount of truth, because he is the slave of the landlord because the landlord is the only one who can give him

the money and he says there is no one but you who can organize the funeral and that again is true, it is the landlord who can carry out the necessary activities that can give a funeral to Budhiya.

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So he is the source of funds, which can make things happen and again the last statement is the truth again who else can I turn to. He has to turn to the landlord for support. So the projection of the landlord as the protector as the father figure one who can come to the rescue at moments of need is rightly offered as the correct narrative, which will get the money from the landlord. I will stop here; I will continue the session in the next time. Thank you.