

Short Fiction in Indian Literature
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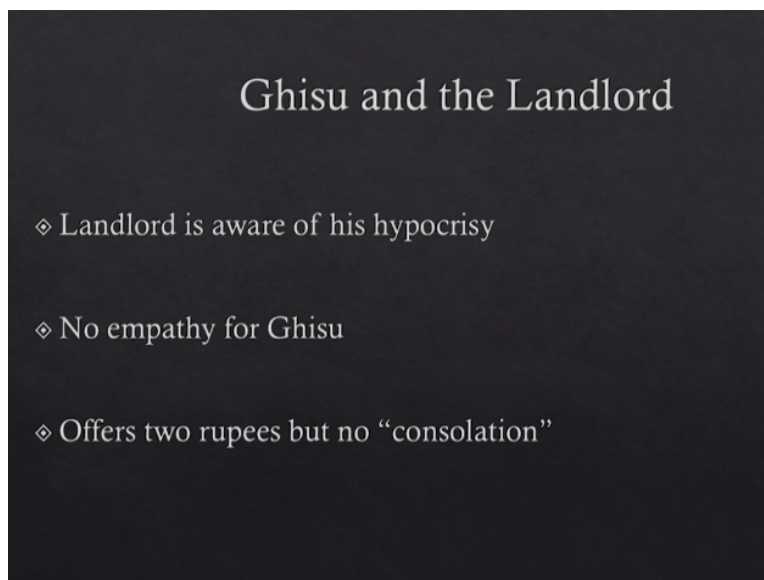
Lecture - 07B
Psychological Climax in Premchand's The Shroud (Continued 2)

Hello and welcome back. We are looking at the psychological climax structure of Premchand's story, The Shroud, and if you recall the previous sessions, I have been talking about how through characterization and through the relationship between the central characters and the other characters around them a particular psychological point or an emotional truth is arrived at by Premchand.

And I have looked at how these 2 central characters have related to the village society and then we have moved on to the relationship between Budhiya and the 2 central characters and how they exploit her death to kind of get some money from the village again. So it is a mishmash of or network of activities on the part of Ghisu and Madhav to exploit the village system, the village economy in some sense for their benefit.

So after the death of Budhiya they go to the landlord and beg for money and the landlord is projected as the father figure.

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Ghisu and the Landlord

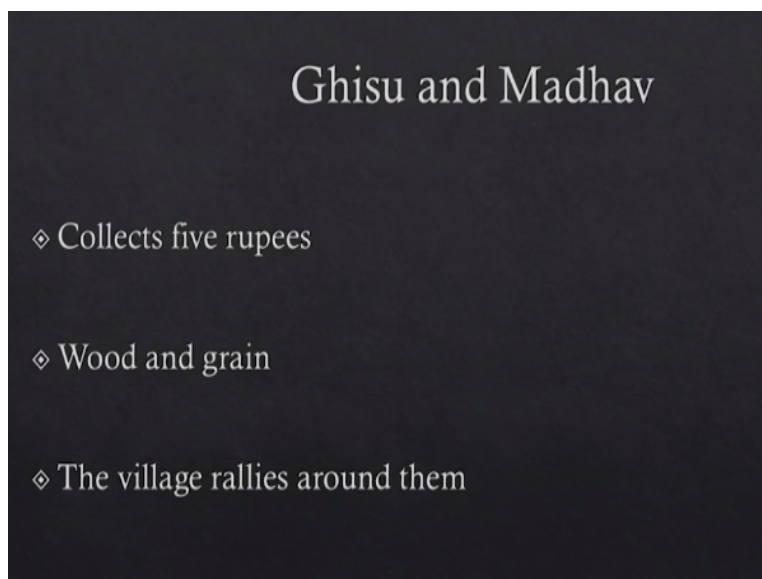
- ◇ Landlord is aware of his hypocrisy
- ◇ No empathy for Ghisu
- ◇ Offers two rupees but no “consolation”

The manufacture of the village and Ghisu rightly points out that the landlord is the one person who can help them in this moment of crisis and it is important to note that the landlord is supremely aware of Ghisu's hypocrisy and he has no empathy whatsoever for Ghisu and Madhav and he has a very thorough understanding of the functioning of these 2 characters who did not do any kind of hard labour but at the same time subsist on the good nature.

Or the good will of the society, the village society, but at this particular moment he does not even want to expel any word on Ghisu. There is no conflation that he gives to Ghisu. The landlord has no words of sympathy for Ghisu and Madhav. He just throws 2 rupees at them and he wants to forget about them. For him they have to get out of his side and they are away from a site is like a burden being taken away from him.

So he throws the money at them and goes away, but Ghisu's strategy is realized. He went to the landlord for money and he got it through the power of his narrative, that cultural cliché that he offers to the landlord about the death, about the broken home and that he has got after the death of Budhiya.

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So using the 2 rupees from the landlord as a kind of token of support as a kind of an example he collects a healthy sum of 5 rupees from the rest of the village from the merchants, from the traders, and again there is wood that is collected by the village society for the funeral and grain

also comes from the village folk. So we can see that the villages rally around for a funeral and that is a very, very ironic attitude once again because if you remember.

When Budhiya was making these blood-curdling shrieks no other village folk pops by the heart to check in on these particular women and it is reasonable to say that the village would have noticed her pregnancy and her labour even during the pregnancy to take care of Ghisu and Madhav and it is very, very odd to notice the absence of women in the heart to look after, to take care of this particular women during her childbirth.

But once she is dead or once she is dead we have these village women who come by and offer words of sympathy who make certain remarks about her and offer a very sympathetic remarks about sentiments about her. So this is again an odd thing. Once she is alive the men are not able to gather money, but once she is dead a money is collected pretty fast and they have 5 rupees on hand and this rallying around of the village folk at the funeral, at the death of Budhiya is also a very, very interesting in terms of the theme.

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Shroud Shopping

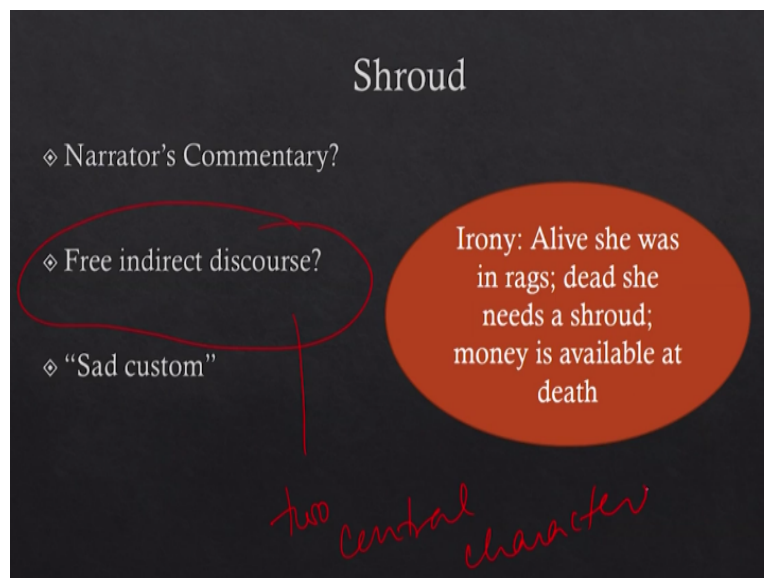
◇ 'What a sad custom, that the woman who didn't even have rags to cover her body while she was alive now needed a shroud. After all, the shroud burned with the body. And then what's left? If the same five rupees had come earlier, there might have been some medicine. Ghisu and Madhav were trying to gauge each other's thoughts.'

And the narrator says that what a sad custom that the women who did not even have rags to cover her body while she was alive now needed a shroud. So wood has been collected, grain has been collected, and now it is the duty of the 2 men to get a shroud to wrap up her dead body, the body of Budhiya and the narrator says that it is a sad custom that the women who did not even

have proper clothes to wear while she was alive now gets a shroud and that is what the 2 men are out to purchase.

After all, the shroud burned with the body and then what is left. If the same 5 rupees that come earlier they might have been some medicine. Ghisu and Madhav were trying to gauge each other's thoughts. So this is the commentary, the apparent commentary of the narrator about this custom of wrapping a dead body in a shroud and is this but the question is, is this is the words of the narrator or is this the thought process of Ghisu and Madhav and that can be a reasonable question to ask us well.

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Because it is not very clear whether the narrator is projecting the thought process of Ghisu and Madhav or is he making a comment on the customs of the society on his part. So if there is ambiguity in these areas then we can say that this is free indirect discourse where it becomes difficult to this entangle, the narrator's commentary from the commentary of the 2 central characters because if you go back to the final statement Ghisu and Madhav were trying to gauge each other's thought.

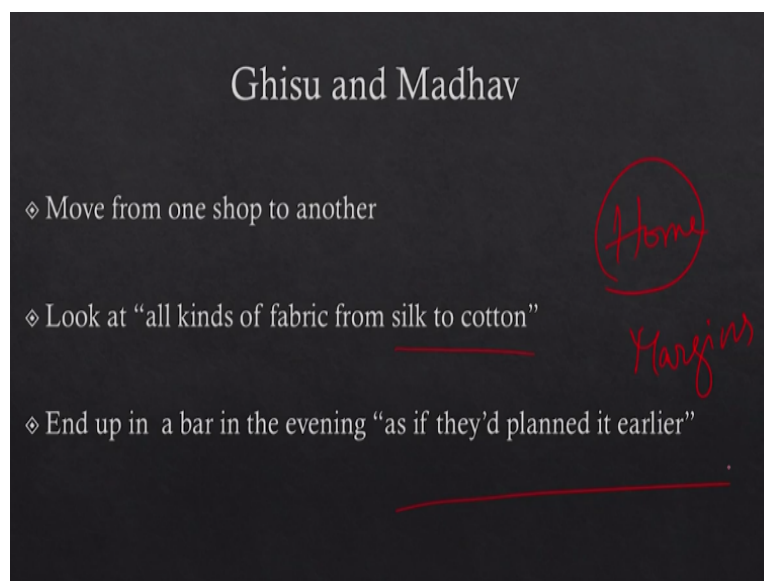
Then the question is this is these ideas or a kind of a connection to this particular statement. So is this a gauging of each other's thoughts. So is these the thoughts of Ghisu and Madhav or is this is the thought of the narrative and when there is ambiguity in that regard we call it free indirect

discourse and again the phrase sad custom it is a sad custom it is a tragic custom of getting a shroud for a woman especially for the women who did not have decent clothes to wear during her life time.

And again the idea of not getting money from the society while she was alive is also very, very significant. So there is a lot of irony in that particular extracts so the irony is this when she was alive she was in rags, but when she was dead and the men collect money and they go out to shop for a decent shroud and money is available when she is dead, but money is not available when she was alive and if they had 5 rupees then probably that could have been spent on medicine.

But the big question is would it have been may be perhaps that was the reason why the villagers were hesitant to offer money to these 2 men because they could have judged that these men would spend it on you know the personal pleasures instead of spending it on the women who needs it. We do not know so we can safely speculate on this particular aspect.

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So Ghisu and Madhav they moved from one shop to another and they look at all kinds of fabric from silk to cotton. This is very, very important to see the range of clothes that they are looking at and we should remember that they were rags and obviously Budhiya too wore rags, but at death they have this opportunity to look at good material, good fabric to give to the dead and we got remember once again that these are men who hardly get anything to eat as a decent meal.

And these men have no material possessions, the only time that we or that in fact all the times that we see them they are in the outside they are always in the outside not within the confines of a home and that is very interesting. If this is the home, they are at the margins of it. So it is these figures are like beggars and nomads and at this moment when the wife of Madhav was dead they get an opportunity to do some kind of window shopping.

They go look at nice stuff, but at the end of it they end up in a bar in the evening. They instead of getting any clothing material for the dead women they end up in a bar in a bar to drink alcohol in the evening and the narrator says that it is as if they had planned it earlier. It is as if they had in their minds that they would end up in the bar, but they take a very circuitous route through the clothes stores and finally they come to this particular place to drink.

And this is very, very anticlimactic and the narrator is almost aware of their motivations so it is almost aware of the desires and the places that they would go to at the end of the day.

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Ghisu and Madhav's attitude

- ◇ 'What is the point of the shroud? It only gets burned, it's not as if it goes with her.'
- ◇ Rich people have money, let them blow it.

ingratitude

So Ghisu and Madhav's attitude towards the idea of buying a shroud is very important and that needs to be looked at and this is the question that they asked and this is the attitude of Ghisu. What is the point of the shroud it only gets burned, it is not as if goes with her? So this is what

Ghisu says. It is a pointless to wrap a body in a shroud because it is going to get burned. She is not going to take it away with her and Madhav says rich people have money.

Let them blow it on these apparently unnecessary stuff, and if you compare these statements and the statement of the narrator they are mirrors of each other, the ideas or mirrors of each other. So we can get a sense that the narrator is somehow sympathetic at certain moments in the story and this is one such moment in the story where they narrator sort of understands that this custom is not really very helpful for these 2 men when they are in such a pathetic and poverty stricken state, but it is very, very sad as well because there is again this idea of ingratitude;

Domestic ingratitude towards Budhiya who fed their shameless stomach and the irony is there because they are going to let this women go to her death unclothed you know without any kind of proper, decent, honorable material to cover her body and the funny thing is that when mother worries that you know this poor woman would have no cloth to cover her when she is undergoing the final rites, funeral rites and Ghisu suggests that they would eventually get for the money and they would Budhiya would get her shroud eventually.

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Manipulative

- ◇ Ghisu's utter confidence about further contribution
- ◇ "Let's say I dropped the money. That we looked and looked but could not find it anywhere. They won't believe a word, but the same lot will give again."

And this is at the confidence in that projection in that anticipation on the part of Ghisu. He is definitely sure that Budhiya would get her shroud from the village and he says that if somebody ask me where is the money, I can say that I dropped the money. He says let us say I dropped the

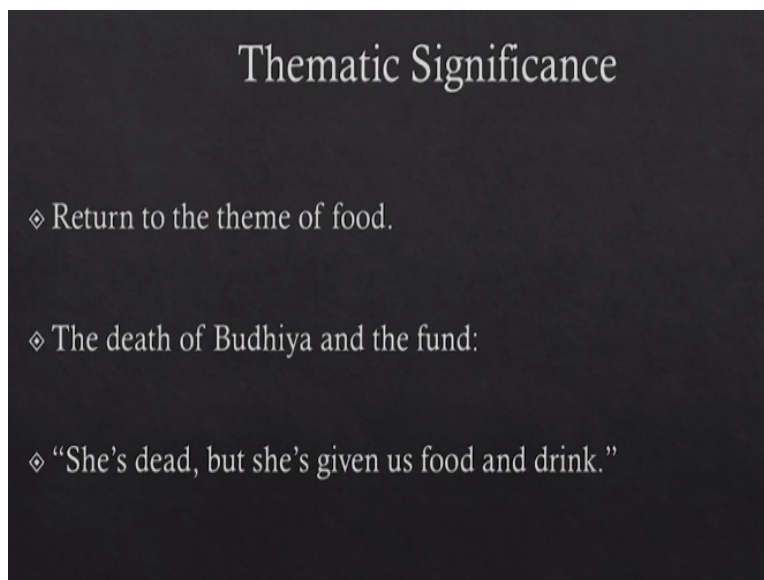
money that we looked in them, but could not find it anywhere. They would not believe a word, but the same lot will give again.

So even this hypothetical idea that we know that we can suggest this is an excuse that the fact that I have lost the money is a very on the feet thought thinking process and he is absolutely sure that he can get away with his very flimsy excuse that he has lost the money and he says that we can tell them that we looked for it, but we could not find it and he is also aware that the village folk will not believe a word of what he has said.

But then the same lot will give again and that is very, very interesting because it again shows us the workings of Ghisu's mind who has a very good understanding of the working of the village economy, the culture economy because even if Ghisu and Madhav may allow Budhiya to burn on the funeral pyre without any clothing on her the village folk will never allow such a thing. They will make sure that Budhiya is given decent funeral.

So this understand is very, very crucial. This understanding of the workings of the society is very crucial and we can see that Ghisu is extremely shrewd.

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So the idea that they enter a bar instead of purchasing clothes makes us come back again to the theme of food. This is very, very interesting in fact I would say that this entire story is not about

the shroud, it is about the idea of a feast, the narrative is obsessive about eating and we need to understand this obsession in the context of the starvation of these 2 figures, prolonged starvation of these 2 figures.

And in fact the death of Budhiya and the fund that is collected as a result of it is a source for the feast that is going to happen at the end of the story for these 2 characters. In fact, the entire story seems to move towards that finale of a feast seen so the death of Budhiya is almost a premise. It is a kind of a spring boot for the narrative to take off and end there with this feasting scene for these 2 starvers and these 2 men who have starved and in fact that is indicated even in the common that they make about her death.

They say that she is dead, but she is given a soothing drink. That seems to be her purpose in life. Budhiya's purpose is to feed the 2 men while she was alive and feed the 2 men through her death as well. In fact, on hindsight, we can even suggest and say that the 2 men wanted her to die because that death would give them some money, a big money at one go so that they can have a good meal out of that event in life.

So if a very, very harsh speculation it is a pessimistic speculation it is a cynical speculation but it is a reasonable speculation considering the idea that these 2 men have been starved by society rightly or wrongly through the because of their own attitudes or because of the attitudes of society they have been conditioned to think and act in this particular way.

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So this is the sort of psychological climax that Premchand is moving towards in this particular story so this narrator which has been speculating about food which has been obsessing about food which has described the activity of eating is kind of going to this particular high point in the story when Ghisu is going to actually realize actually enjoy one other feast in his life time and Madhav is going to get the first big feast of his life.

So they drink alcohol, they get a bottle of alcohol, they eat fried fish, they eat puris, they have chutneys and other things and there is an eatery just outside of the bar and they go get food from that eatery and have a fantastic meal out of the money which was supposed to be used by them to buy the shroud for the dead woman Budhiya. So this is a bizarre finale to the story. It is a monstrous finale in fact at 1 level, but another level perhaps the narrator and the way the story has progressed.

It tells us that these men have been conditioned to behave in such a way by this attitude that the society have towards these men. That part has not been described in great detail by the narrator, but we can speculate about it as well. So prolonged starvation and the way that the society functions creates such monsters such bizarre characters who exploit each and every thing around them in order to satisfy the hunger pangs that they suffer.

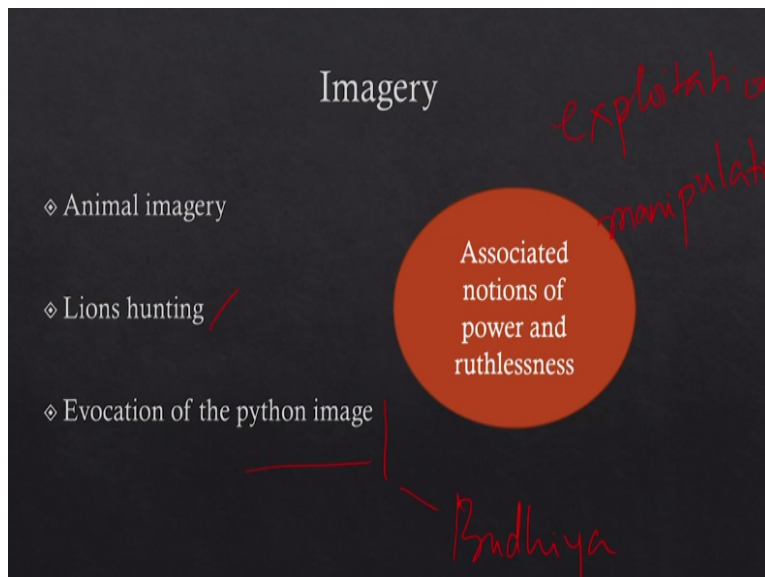
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Psychological Climax

◇ They two of them sat eating their puris, as grandly as if they were lions hunting in the jungle. They were not afraid of being responsible to anyone, nor did they worry about their reputations. They had conquered those virtues long ago.

So the 2 of them sat eating their puris as grandly as they were lions hunting in the jungle. They were not afraid of being responsible to anyone, nor did they worry about their reputations. They had conquered those virtues long ago. So this is the end of the story. This is the satisfaction that they derive at the end of their day when they are supposed to be carrying out these funeral activities instead what they do is they enjoy the feast and I want to bring your attention to the animal imagery, the imagery of animals hunting in the jungle.

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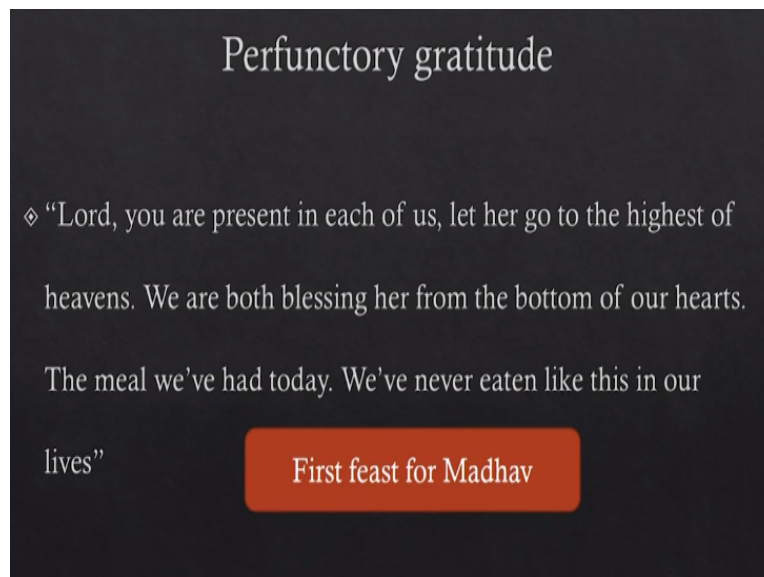
Earlier we had the image of the python to describe these 2 men who enjoy a potato meal, potatoes that they have plucked out from somebody's else field and which they roast and eat and now again we have the image of lions hunting and eating their prey and even in the context of

the previous image we had Budhiya who was dying and there is a suggestion that these 2 men are exploiting suffocating their prey and the prey here is Budhiya.

And even here instead of offering the shroud to Budhiya they lion like they hunt and eat and satisfy the primitive hunger pangs so there are a lot of associated ideas of power and ruthlessness on the part of these 2 men and it is the power they derive through exploitation and manipulation that is again another idea and these attitudes of exploitation and manipulation they kind of uniformly carry out in relation to everybody and Budhiya has been exploited by them greatly because she is "slaved these 2 men"

She married Madhav and so she has to serve that particular family and they manipulate when they cannot exploit they manipulate the attitudes of the people around them and if you remember that the people offer the money even though they know these 2 characters and their attitudes. So these 2 characters are on sufferance and they kind of manipulate that attitude and there was gratitude that they express to Budhiya.

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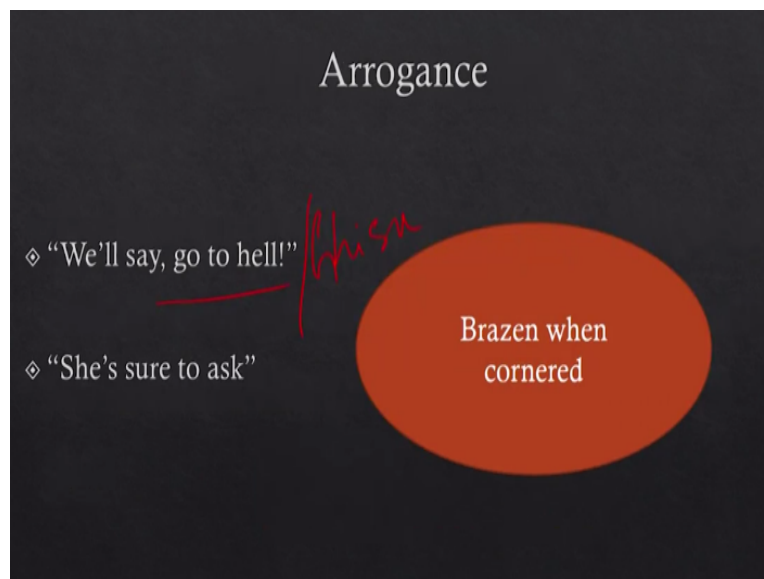
But it is a perfunctory attitude. There is no real truth to the emotion that is there and this is the words of Madhav and he says Lord you are present in each of us, let her go to the highest of heavens. Let Budhiya go to the highest of heavens. We are both blessing her from the bottom of

our hearts. The meal we have had today we have never eaten like this in our life. So as I said this is the first big feast for Madhav.

And I think this will be a kind of a happy memory for Madhav for the future and this can become a memory to which he comes back time and again to talk about it later in his life so just as Ghisu had a happy memory about a landlord's wedding feast Madhav can have this feast as a happy memory a feast that he had at the death of his wife. It is a massive irony. It is a monstrous irony, but it is a happy memory for Madhav.

And he blesses her from the bottom of his heart and thanks off for her death and he asks God to let her go to the highest of heavens. And again as I said this is there is a lot of irony here and as I said while there is perfunctory gratitude there is also arrogance and that tells you that the emotions of these 2 men cannot be relied upon at any given point of time.

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So at one point they are very, very grateful to Budhiya for dying and giving them this big feast at another point they can be very, very arrogant and even harsh to her memory and let us look at this small conversation here on the slide and Madhav says what if she asks you know what if she comes back in a dream and asks where is my shroud and Ghisu says we will say go to hell and he says she is sure to ask and this idea of asking her to go hell is the real reality of these 2 men.

They do not care about anyone anybody in society and if you look at the previous extract that this extract is also very important because the narrator tells us that they were not afraid of being responsible to anybody. They are not subservient to anyone. They are outside of that civilized set up that civilized society where there are hierarchies, where there are structures where there is a lot of disciplining happening in terms of the members of that society.

They are outside of that particular circle of life since they are outside they do not have to worry about their reputations and they had no compunction. They have no moral compass whatsoever. So if you remember this sort of ideas about them we can easily understand this attitude of Ghisu who says that we will ask Budhiya to go to hell if and it is very interesting because in the previous moment they are extremely grateful.

They are grateful that she gave us this big meal and they say that she goes to heaven. They ask the Lord to send her to heaven and now they ask her to go to hell. So we can see the wild mood swings are brought about both by intoxication and by brazen arrogance of the quality of their minds and they become brazen when they are cornered when they are put in a corner when they are forced they are very, very arrogant and very resistant to any kind of moral discipline.

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Faith in Society

“She’ll have a shroud. And a finer one than this.”

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“The same people who gave us this one! Though, this time, we’re not going to see the cash”

Shrewd assessment and anticipation

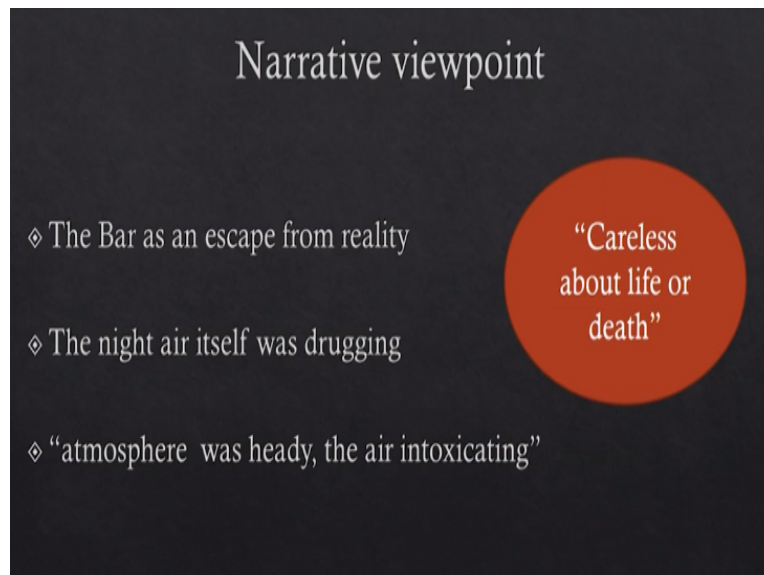
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So he says Ghisu says she will have a shroud and a final one done this and they say that you know she will eventually get a shroud and that shows Ghisu's faith in the society and the society

believes in its cultural and religious rituals and he says that the same people who gave us this one will give us the money for another shroud and he says though this time we are not going to see the cash, so the same traders, the same land lords.

The same merchants who gave money to us to buy the shroud will once again give money, but this time they will not probably hand it to us they will buy the shroud by themselves. So we can see how the brain of Ghisu works out the solution for the problem of the shroud and there is assessment and there is anticipation and that also probably kind of you know comforts them makes them enjoy the meal. So we also get a view point of the narrator about the specialty of the bar.

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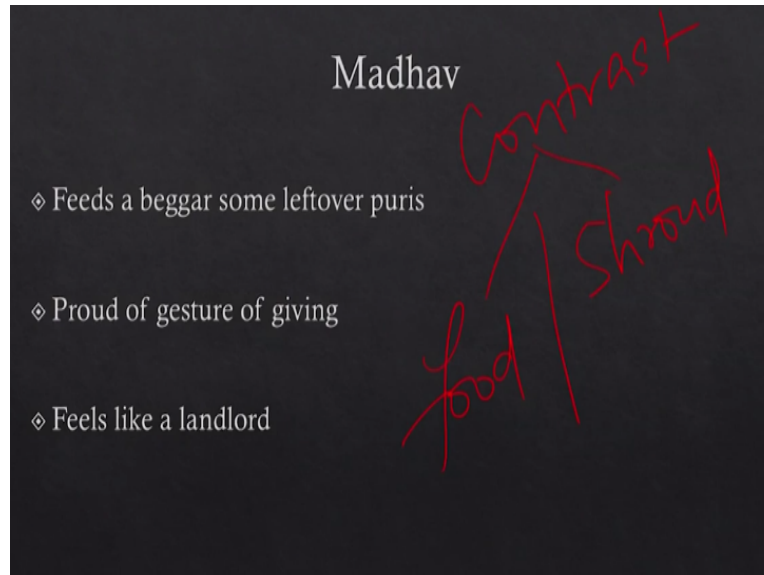


So we began at the heart at the beginning of the story and we end up in the bar and the bar is a space about an escape from reality. So many of the villagers and the narrator says that the night air itself was drugging was itself like a stimulant. They did not have to drink the alcohol to become drugged, the air around the bar itself had such an effect on the customers and many of the people who were there were there for the atmosphere.

And as I said the air itself was intoxicating and most of the people who visited this place were carries about life or death. They had indifference a detachment about life and this is where they

end up. This is where they end up both Ghisu and Madhav where they get drunk and they get a kind of an escape from reality.

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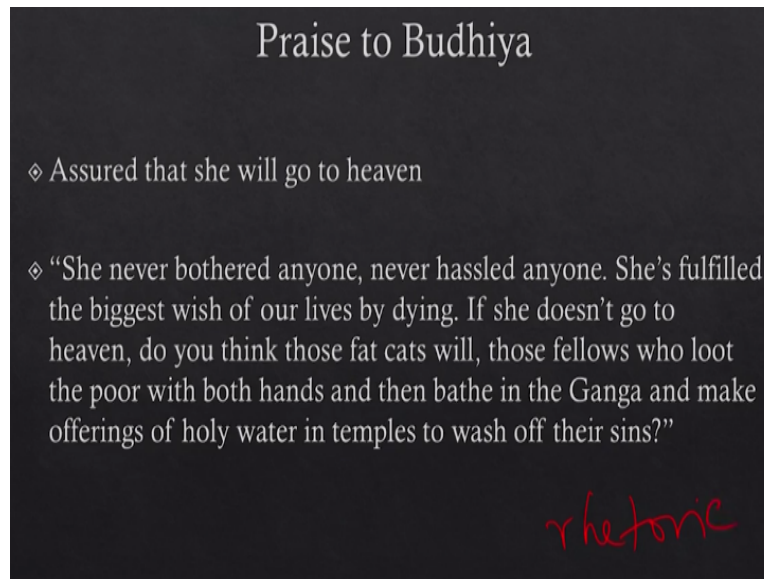


Another very significant attitude is that when they were feasting at the end of their feast Madhav feeds the beggar with some left over puris and that gesture gives him a lot of pride and he is very, very satisfied that he can you know get this opportunity to give someone something and he is happy. He is contented by that act and again the idea of food bringing a lot of containment and satisfaction instead of the shroud and the buying of it and the covering of his wife with the shroud not giving the containment can be seen here.

So there is a nice contrast here that we can see between the purchase of food and the purchase of shroud which does not actually happen and when Madhav feeds the beggar he feels like a landlord that gesture of giving makes him feel like a landlord. So there is a fantastical social claiming in that act it is a momentary social climbing act when he offers the puris to the beggar. So it is a bizarre scene in some respects but also a logical one.

If we keep in mind the social culture background of these 2 men and the prolonged starvation which conditions their psyche to worry only about food and they are like animals like pythons and lions whose only primary aim in life is to satisfy the hunger and there is no humanity left within the psyche.

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And again this, a kind of a back and forth attitudes in relation to Budhiya the praise her again and they are assured they are convinced that they will go to heaven and they asks she never bother anyone, never hassled anyone. She has fulfilled the biggest wish of our lives by dying. If she does not go to heaven, do you think those fat cats will, those fellows who loot the poor with both hands and then bathe in the Ganga and make offerings of holy water in temples to wash off their sins.

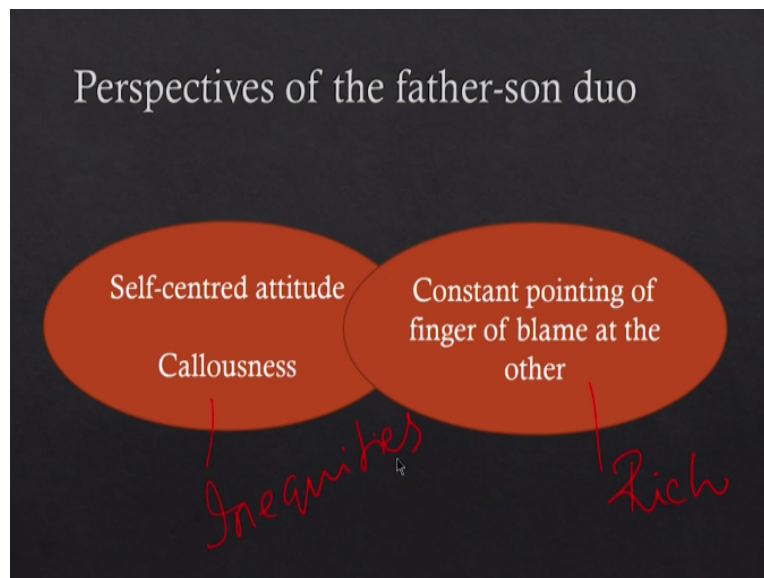
So they again have a very almost clichéd and black and white contrasting set of ideas about the rich and the poor they say that she has been so good and she has been the picture of goodness. She did not trouble anyone she was she has been very helpful by giving them the food that they really needed and if she does not go to heaven do you think those rich people will go to heaven who the people who had exploited the poor with their hands and then go and take a bathe in the Ganga they think they will go to heaven.

So this is a very, very expected and cliché question and perhaps this question is asked by them to satisfy or kind of explain away their exploitation in some respects. So they say that the poor has been exploited by rich and the rich will not go to heaven despite their bathing in the Ganga and that kind of understanding and that kind of contrast that they have in their mind seems to offer

them some kind of solace and comfort about their personal individual exploitation of their women and the people around them.

So it is a kind of rehearsed rhetoric that is how I see it. It is a rehearsed rhetoric and that rhetoric has a function of satisfying them.

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And again that rhetoric reveals that self-centered attitude of Ghisu and Madhav in their treatment of Budhiya and their callousness towards Budhiya and the constant pointing of finger of blame at the other is done by them. Again that is what this extract also reveals. They constantly blame the rich for all their inequities, their personal inequities. And we need to remember that they have been very exploitative as well they are poor, they are of the lowest of the low.

But they have exploited the woman who has been within their home and that is to be understood and we cannot simply buy their rhetoric which seems to be what they resort to at every moment to explain away their state of affairs.

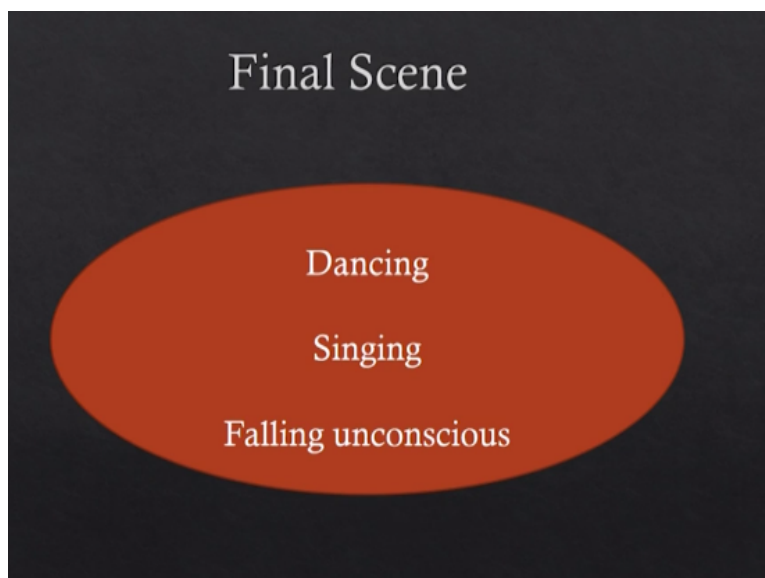
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So as I said there are a lot of mood swings on the part of these 2 men. And there was a momentary guilt and sorrow on the part of Madhav and that guilt is brushed away by this older Ghisu who says that she has been freed. Budhiya has been freed from the world of elusion. She has escaped the cage of life and again all these are cliché's.

And Ghisu has a bag full of clichés to kind of bring out at every necessary moment and with these cliché's he kind of consoles his son Madhav and that seems to be his bag of cliché's seems to be his philosophical attitude towards life and his presence and his friend's presence in the village society.

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So the final scene with which the story ends is about their dancing it is about their singing and it is about their falling unconscious and that is where the story ends. It is a kind of goes to that feasting as the high point of the finale and after the feasting we have dancing and singing and they fall unconscious in a heap. So this is very reflective of an earlier moment if we call that moment after the filling potato meal they fall unconscious. They fall asleep you know so there was a nice parallel there.

This falling asleep after a big meal is repeated at the end of the story as well and in that earlier meal there was Budhiya who was dying and at this later meal she is dead. So again the obsessive concern of this particular story is about food and its sourcing and food at the cost of any human being that seems to be the bottom line of this particular story and this is the psychological climax of the story that starved people at in monstrous ways. Thank you for listening. I will catch up with you in the next session.