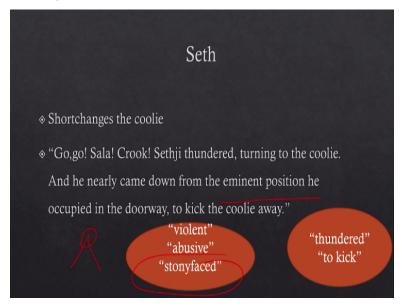
Short Fiction in Indian Literature Prof. Divya A Department of Humanities and Social Sciences Indian Institute of Technology – Madras

Lecture - 09B Catharsis in Mulk Raj Anand's The Price of Bananas - III

Hello and welcome back to the notion of Catharsis and Mulk Raj Anand short fiction, The Price of bananas." Okay, so we have seen how the attitude of this businessman Seth, kind of short change, short changes both the Coolie and the Fruit Vendor.

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So he kind of becomes exposed in terms of his you know, in terms of his attitude towards people who are beneath him socially and economically. So this is the reaction of the set when the Coolie asks for more money. He says, "Go-go! Sala! Crook! Sethji thundered, turning to the Coolie and he nearly came down from the eminent position he occupied in the doorway, to kick the Coolie away.

So the businessman has climbed the steps of the train compartment and he is standing in the doorway while he is thundering and he while he is thundering at the Coolie who has dare to ask for more money and we see the violent side the really abusive side of set getting reinforced here early on when he shouted at the monkey we could see this aspect of violence and abuse that he that he has in his you know psyche.

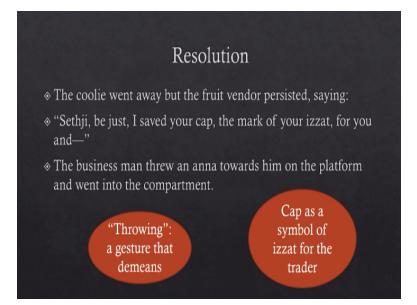
But again that is getting reinforced here and he almost comes down the steps in order to kick the Coolie away. So the physical threat that he is capable of is also made apparent there. And very significant is the set of words employed by the narrator to talk about the position that he is in literally he is at the head of the steps in the doorway and that is indicative of the social hierarchy the pyramid at the top of which Seth is in.

So the there is a kind of a symbolic parallel between the steps of a train compartment and the doorway which is at the top of it and social hierarchy or the social ladder. So the Coolie is at the bottom of the ladder while the Seth is at the top of it. So he is in a position to kick the Coolie away that eminent position is also again of a slight sense of sarcasm there in the choice of the word eminent there is nothing eminent about the doorway there unless you want to highlight the you know the first-class nature of the of the doorway.

So the narrator is suckley attacking the positions that Seth is taking in his relationship with this Coolie. So the idea that it is the Seth who is Stoney-faced is also very, very interesting. And the other observation that you can make is that not only is the Seth stony-faced in fact the onlookers of which there must be a good many because you know only a moment ago they witnessed the monkey returning that cap.

We can see that the onlookers once again have do not step in this episode in this interaction between the Seth and the Coolie nobody wants to intervene there unless it the narrator who intercedes for the benefit of the Coolie.

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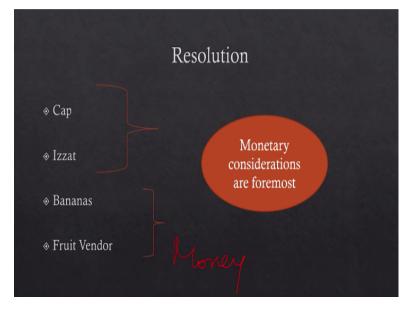
The Coolie went away but the fruit vendor persisted saying, "Sethji, be just, I saved your cap, the mark of your izzat, for you and— "The business meant threw an anna towards him on the platform and went into the compartment. So while the Coolie just meekly goes away the fruit vendor hangs about and he pleads with him he supplicates he says, be just, be you know, be right in the way you in the way you respond where is your sense of righteousness.

He says, I saved your cap, the mark of your izzat, the mark of your dignity and the businessman just throws and that throwing is a gesture that demeans the person who is receiving that object that money from the person who is giving it away. So he not only demeans the Coolie by trying to kick him he also de means the fruit vendor, so all these gestures reinforce the class position the social position of these characters dotting the landscape of this region.

So that is something that we need to keep in mind. So the words and the behavior; the words uttered by the Seth and the behavior expressed by the Seth are part of a kind of a part and parcel of a set of attitudes which not only establish the superiority within coats of the person who is expressing and speaking these words but also the inferiority of those people who are at the receiving end. So both the receiver and the-- you know--

Person who is expressing words and actions establish the, the hierarchy the difference in-- the difference between people in society. And the other interesting thing in this conversation that

comes to the surface is that the cap is a symbol of izzat, dignity for the trader that is at least at least that is the theory whereas in fact the reactions of the Seth does not seem to indicate that he places a massive amount of regard for that cap offer his self-respect or dignity so that is another interpretation a subversive interpretation that becomes apparent. Okay.



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So again the connection that I want to draw between a Cap and Izzat and then the Bananas and the Fruit Vendor. And as I mentioned before the cap or is it is not the foremost of his consideration of the considerations of the Seth instead what is significant for him are the price of banana as the money that he has to offer for the bananas to this particular fruit vendor and that he does not want to do.

So this becomes secondary or less important whereas the money aspect becomes primary and I as a trader he wants to he wants to defeat the person who is at the other end of this deal and which is the fruit vendor. So the fruit vendor also becomes an opponent and the bananas becomes a kind of commodity over which these 2 characters' struggle.

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Seth's attitude

You don't know, Sahib, you don't know these budmashes! They are in
league with the monkeys! Bananas are two a pice! Fancy asking for an
anna for one rotten banana!

This seemed to me outrageous and I was dumb with the shock of the astute businessman's calculations.

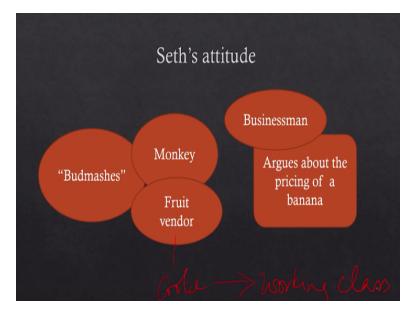
So when the narrator intervenes on the behalf of this fruit vendor he says, You don't know, Sahib, you don't know these budmashes! They are in league with the monkeys! Bananas are two a pice! Fancy asking for an anna for one rotten banana! This seemed to me outrageous and I was dumb with the shock of the astute businessman's calculations.

So this is the understanding this is the observation of this businessman about what had happened in terms of the monkey and the fruit vendor. And it is very important to note the choice of addiction the choice of words again budmashes. If you remember the earlier exchange the fruit vendor also called the monkey as a budmashe and he did it with a sense of affection with a kind of a almost kind of motherly almost a kind of a gentle reaction to the activities of these monkeys.

And he utters this word budmashe in a very harsh manner and he clubs everybody together the monkeys and the Coolies and the fruit renders. And she says that they are in league with the monkeys they are all acting together they are part of this you know underhanded deal and he says bananas are just two a pice! And fancy asking for anna for one rotten banana. And this understanding seems so outrageous to the narrator to this painter to this artist.

In he says, I was shocked, I was shocked at the astute businessman's calculations and-- astute means very sharp.

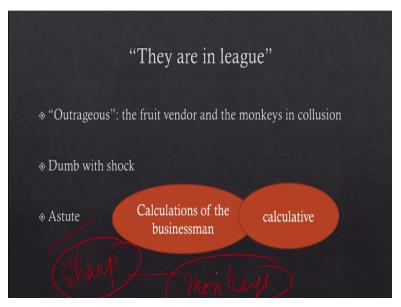
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So as I mentioned before Budmashes refer both to the Monkey and the Fruit Vendor and to the Coolie and to the whole working class itself. So you can just extend that-- extend that metaphor to all the people who serve the upper class. And then as I mentioned that this guy is a businessman an astute businessman a rich businessman and he is, you know successful at his business otherwise he would not be rich and he argues about the pricing of the banana.

He says that bananas are just you know, you can get a two bananas for an anna and this guy is asking an anna for just one banana, so he is just you know, splitting hairs over the pricing of such a commodity which came to his help in a critical situation. So even at this moment his businessman's you know attitudes are working very well. And what the narrator finds the outrageous fact that—

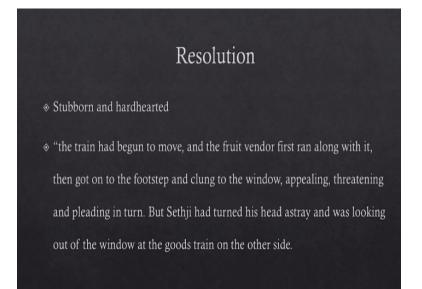
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It the suggestion that, the fruit vendor and the monkeys are acting together are in collusion in order to cheat this businessman and that makes him dumb with shock that suggestion makes the narrator dumb with shock; it is a very—you know that is the reaction of the narrator. And he again admits the narrator himself admits that he is a steward sharp and again it is very interesting that this idea of sharpness of mind is also associated with the monkeys.

So both the monkeys and the antagonist in the story have this quality which they share between themselves that is being very, very sharp. So this businessman is very, very calculative and his calculative attitude is expressed in the way he also literally calculates and keeps note of the prices of bananas. What is very evident is the fact that he is also very stubborn and very hard-hearted.

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He does not give an even an inch in order to satisfy the demands or the request or the pleadings of the service folk in the story. So he is inside the compartment and the train had begun to move and the fruit vendor first ran along with it then got onto the foot step and clung to the window appealing, threatening, pleading in turn but Sethji had turned his head astray and was looking out of the window at the goods train on the other side.

So it is a very moving moment in the story. And we have this, a fruit vendor clinging to the window of a moving train. And he is begging alternatively begging and then threatening and then again begging but the Sethji has turned his head away and he looks at a goods train. What is important in this moment is this narratively speaking in terms of structure this moment could be taken—

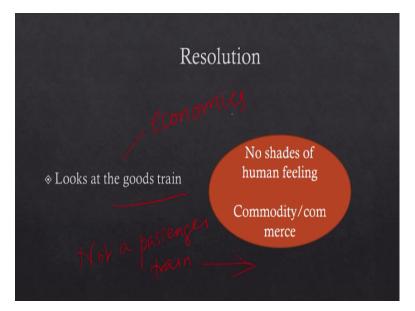
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As another crisis in the story instead of resolution, and if you treat this as a resolution the crisis is just the crisis with the monkey and the cap, that is the first and big crisis in the story. However, there is also an alternative way of looking at it looking at the at this moment of the story and seeing this moment as the crisis where a human being puts his life at risk in order to get a paltry sum of money from a very rich man.

So this man is begging and threatening for money and that just he is putting his own life at risk and this could be the high point of the story in another way of interpretation. So what is the man the tradesman doing while this man is begging, hanging onto the window of a moving train is that he is looking.

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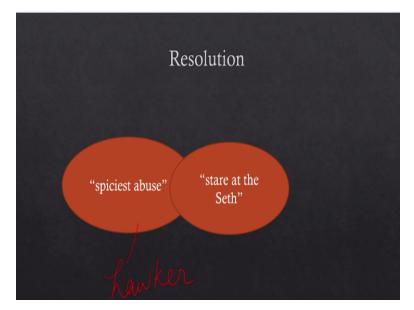


The businessman is looking at the goods train and that goods train is also very, very symbolic in the sense that it is not a passenger train, which means there are no human beings which means it is a transport which is not associated with any kind of humanity or human emotions, okay. So a goods train is about transporting goods and transporting goods means transporting commodities in order to make money.

So the goods train is associated with economics with finances and that is what this man is looking at that this trader is looking at and that is a very, very appropriate object to look at for this particular Seth. It is an ideal object for him and there is no shade of human feeling in the Seth and there is no human occupant in the goods train. So what the goods train and the Seth is all about is commodity and commerce and there is no any connection to human feeling or emotion whatsoever.

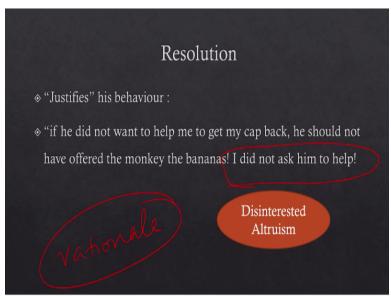
So how does this crisis resolve itself, the crisis with the hawker hanging onto the train window is this way for the hooker.

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The hawker offers the spiciest abuse, so that is the weapon he has nothing else, so he abuses this trader and gets off the train as the train leaves the platform and how do the occupants in the firstclass compartment react they just stare at the Seth that is what they can do as well until a particular action of the narrator. So they stare at the Seth and do not say anything.

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Now the Seth is hard-pressed to justify his behavior and his justification is very, very interesting and it suggests that here we have a man who is really, really crafty and hard-hearted. He is not only rich but he is also extremely clever and this is his rationale. And this is his rationale for behaving in a in a strict manner with the fruit vendor. He says that, "if he did not want to help me to get my cap back, he should not have offered the monkey the bananas! I did not ask him to help!

He said, I did not ask him to help! And he is quite right, he did not ask him to help him in any way the fruit vendor voluntarily helps this trader. If you recall the first part of this lecture you will know that this man walked on forged ahead without getting the permission or the agreement of the Seth in order to get the cap back. So he says that, if he did not want to help me get my cap back he should not have, you know he should not have you know, offered the bananas.

And then he should not have asked for money for the bananas. What he should have done is offered Disinterested Altruism, help him without expecting any kind of reward for his behavior. So what the fruit vendor did was not altruism it is a very calculated move on the part of the fruit seller to make some kind of business through the plight of the Seth, through the plight of this rich businessman.

So he says that what has happened here is not help but some kind of business deal, so which is why he is not very happy with the way this man asked for money for the banana. So it is a very interesting argument that he puts forth. And the people in the compartment are, you know not very happy with the logic of this trader and especially the narrator who is really angry with the narrator and he just speaks to nobody in particular and says that—

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Resolution through the narrator

♦ "The rich Sahukars always go to heaven!"

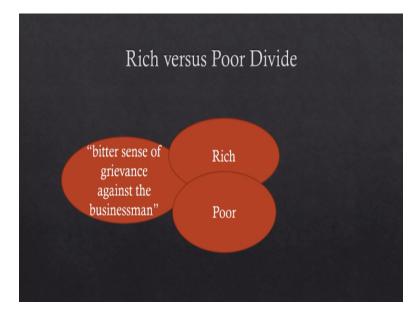
- & Expresses hostility through his gaze
- * "The anger in my soul mounted even as the Seth seemed to cool down and assume an air of casual indifference."

"The rich Sahukars always go to heaven!" And the implication being the ivory being that this man might not go to heaven this man would not go to heaven on the contrary he would go to hell. So he is extremely hostile, the narrator is extremely hostile and angry and he expresses his anger hostility through his gaze and the Seth becomes aware of that and nature of the gaze and he turns away.

And then the narrator says, "The anger in my soul—it is very interesting choice for the anger in my soul mounted increased even as the Seth seemed to cool down and assume an air of casual indifference." So the Seth becomes very, you know normal he seems to have forgotten the entire incident with the Coolie and the fruit talker and h assumes an air of indifference casual indifference nonchalance and he the narrator is angered by his calmness.

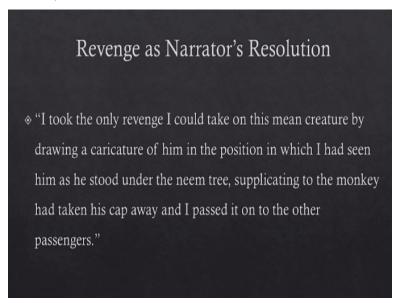
So-- and the narrator also suggest that in the compartment in the first-class compartment on the part of the Bureaucrats on the part of the Sikhs--

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There is a bitter sense of grievance. They are all upset and angry with this businessman because he is rich and he behaved in a particularly nasty manner to the two poor people he came in contact with, the Coolie and the fruit vendor. So there was a bitter sense of a grievance, so that the choice of words against captures the intensity of the anger and annoyance on the part of the people who occupied the compartment. And the narrator says that--

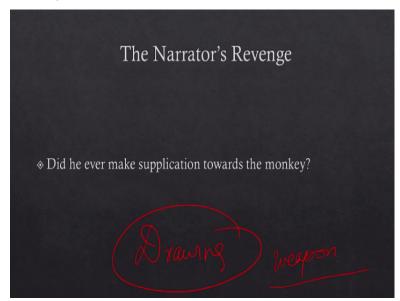
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"I took the only revenge I could take on this mean creature by drawing a caricature of him in the position in which I had seen him as he stood under the neem tree, supplicating to the monkey, supplicating to the monkey which had taken his cap away and I passed it on to the other passengers."

So what the narrator does is, he draws a caricature and-- a caricature which captures the way he stood under the neem tree, begging the money to return monkey to return the cap and he shares the caricature with the rest of the passengers in the first-class compartment. But my question is— the very interesting reaction on the part of the narrator is his revenge.

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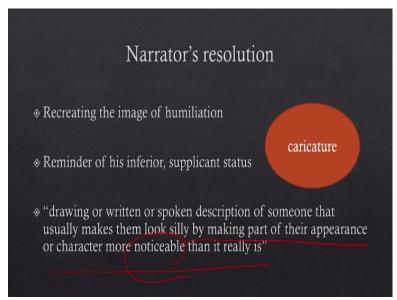
He takes revenge on the Seth through his drawing. So-- and if you remember early on he said a mere drawing will not help in capturing the various shades of feeling that is a part of a particular incident that happened during his travels. And now once again he resorts to drawing and this time the drawing seems to be the appropriate weapon for this narrative to take a revenge on this businessman Seth.

My question again is this one. Did the businessman ever make supplication towards the Monkey? And in the caricature the narrator says that he captured the Seth in a position in which he is begging to the monkey to return the cap. So if you read the story closely I do not think he ever begged the monkey, all he did was threaten a challenge it and offered curses to the monkey. So this caricature just seems to be a sort of wish fulfillment too.

There is a slant in the caricature as to how the events unfolded to- the narrative somehow making up certain you know, just on the part of Seth in his drawing in order to make him really pathetic

and an object of mockery, so he is trying to pull the Seth's social level down in order to inflict some punishment on him.

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So as I said he is recreating the image of humiliation and if this caricature becomes a reminder of his inferior supplicant status, so even though he is not literally inferior even though this character of this tradesman is not inferior he is not a supplicant; the caricature makes him to be in order to destroy; in order to hollow out his class status and in order to attack his ego. And what is the meaning of a caricature, let us be clear about that.

A caricature is a drawing or written or spoken description of someone that usually makes them look silly by making part of the appearance or character more noticeable than it really is. So this is where especially by making part of the appearance of character more noticeable; this is perhaps where our narrator sneaks in this notion of, you know pleading this notion of begging on the part of Seth in his relation to the monkey.

Perhaps this figure never begged perhaps Seth never begged to anybody so he wants this character to do that at least in this caricature which is perhaps he draws him in that manner. (Refer Slide Time: 24:59)

Catharsis

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; ... through pity [eleos] and fear [phobos] effecting the proper purgation [catharsis] of these emotions" (c. 350 BCE, Book 6.2). Aristotle's *Poetics*

Now I want to come to this idea of Catharsis. This is a story which I would call tragic for the most part even though there are comic moments in the narrative. The comic moments being one in which we had a pious Hindu lose his loin cloth to the monkey, there could be moments of hilarity there and there are also moments of hilarity when our set lost his embroidered cap to the monkey for a brief amount of time and onlookers laugh at it.

So there are these moments of laughter, littering, dotting this story (()) (25:49) but ultimately this is a tragic story in the sense that the weakest of the of the society such as the Coolie and the fruit vendor do not get what is their due. They are disappointed even though they putting a lot of effort in order to make a living. So in that sense it is a tragedy, it is a tragedy for the Coolie who goes away disappointed.

He does not get you know, that many annas that is due to him and it is a tragedy for the fruit vendor who clung to the moving train in order to get that one anna back it is not a lot of money just one extra anna which is important for him in order to make a living. So it is a tragedy in that sense and it is in the-- when I said tragedy it is not, you know deaths that makes a narrative to be a tragic one.

Even massive emotional disappointment can make a story tragic psychologically, so in that sense I am using the word pretty loosely here. But, despite being a tragedy there is a moment of

catharsis, a release in the story at the end through the gesture of the narrator. So what is catharsis, the process of releasing and thereby providing relief from strong or repressed emotion, so when you release certain hard repressed emotions you get a sense of relief you feel good, you feel calm, you feel happy and that relief is catharsis.

And that and that catharsis happens in the story. There are strong repressed emotions on the part of certain people in the story, in fact if you go back to the earlier point that I was making about the bitter sense of grievance against the businessman and the attitude of the narrator who says that there was lot of anger in my soul, so all these are, you know repressed strong emotions that that is there in the minds of a certain set of people and a particular activity of the narrator.

The act of drawing a caricature and sharing it with the community in a compartment helps in the process of catharsis; there is a release; there is a release of strong emotions and there is relief all around. And where do I get this idea of catharsis it is there in Aristotle's Poetics and there is a reference to catharsis there, let me quickly read that except.

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is series, complete and of a certain magnitude; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions." So a proper purgation, removal of these emotions has a cathartic effect at the end of this story. So there is pity in tragedy there is fear in a tragedy and these are released through the end of a tragic story. So while this story does not fit in to the idea of tragedy established by Aristotle we do not see the fall of a hero here.

Or a really famous character in this particular story I am kind of placing the tragedy in the context of the weaker characters the socially and economically poorer characters and that is where I see the tragedy is because it is ultimately victory for the Seth who gets his cap back and who is on his way in the train, he does not get thrown off the train like Sir, Mohanlal in an Khushwant singh Karma.

So that something we need to keep in mind in order to get the context of success that this character Seth enjoys. Okay.

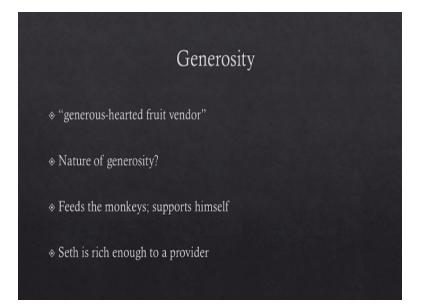
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So again as I mentioned a laughter that is elicited through the caricature of the Seth becomes a cathartic for the occupants of the first-class compartment. So both the Breaucrats and the Skihs enjoy this caricature and they want to share this with Seth himself the Seth's man himself but the narrator restrained them. I think he knew, he being Seth, he knew from the ease which arose after the cartoon had been passed around that our relaxed smiles with index of his discomfiture.

So the narrator suggests that this man this tradesman probably knew what was on that piece of paper and how relieved the-- those people who had looked at the caricature had been that drawing had been; he knew that they were kind of laughing at his discomfort or his you know you know embarrassment or humiliation. So he-- the narrator says that the Seth knows what has had happened in terms of that drawing.

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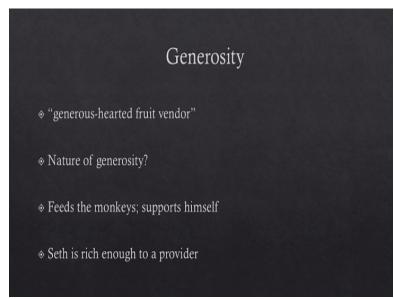
Now I want to pick up on this idea of generosity which associated with the fruit vendor. So we have two sets of people here and in fact, if you if you just concentrate on the narrative it there is just one set of people who are all sympathetic towards this generous hearted fruit vendor and this evil man is obviously the Seth whom they are against. So, I was wondering about this adjective generous hearted and I wanted to explore that a generosity what is the nature of the generosity.

So if you recall the logic of the Seth who says that if he really wanted to help me he should not expect money that is his argument and-- which makes us question was this fruit vendor really generous. However, if we look at the issue from a different perspective he is generous in one sense and that is he realizes the scarcity of food among the monkeys, the monkeys who are starving almost on an on a daily basis who are scavenging on you know leftovers and meagre spoils and he realizes their need.

And he perhaps if he has cooked up this conspiracy he realizes their need and he comes up with their strategy to take from the rich and give it to the poor, and the poor here could is the monkeys on the one hand and he himself because a fruit vendor is not a very wealthy himself. So he is feeding the monkey so he is generous in that sense and he is also supporting himself along the way.

And we need to realize that this Seth this tradesman is rich enough to be a provider to the people who are in need on this famished landscape.

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Now let's come to this idea of punishment that has been meted out to this Seth, in fact he gets away pretty decently I would say. There was a minimum amount of humiliation that he suffers on the train station he gets laughed at. But that is nothing in scale compared to the amount of embarrassment that the Coolie or the fruit vendor suffers at the hands of Seth.

So the index of his discomfiture that is referred to at the end of the story is not a sufficient punishment in my assessment and, you know mere embarrassment before equals, equals in the sense of that community in the first-class compartment is what, you know he gets at the end of the day mere embarrassment once again. And he does not even get to see the caricature even though he guesses what is in it, he does not literally see the picture in his hand.

So the Seth, the tradesmen the rich tradesman gets off pretty easily in this story despite inflicting a lot of harassment and abuse and mere violence to the people who are inferior to him. (Refer Slide Time: 34:30)

The Price of Bananas
The Thee of Dananas
Significance?
♦ "Two a pice"?
⊗ Anna a piece?
♦ Priceless in the context?

Now again, let us come back to this title "The Price of Bananas." What is the significance of the title? Literally, what is the price of bananas is we do not know, is the Seth correct? Is the businessman correct? Or is the fruit render correct in terms of what exactly is the price of a banana. Is it to apprise or an anna piece of banana? We are not sure, we do not know who is who is the correct assessor of the price.

But the other interpretation is that the bananas are priceless in this context because these bananas help, you know satisfy the hunger of the monkeys in this train station and the monkeys are the descendants of general Hanuman and his troop of --troop of monkeys who had assisted Lord Rama in his battle against the demon-king of Lanka.

So-- and we also need to remember that these monkeys and the descendants are upholders of righteousness and they help in fighting against the demons in society, so ultimately the price of bananas is, you know cannot be calculated it is beyond any kind of pricing.

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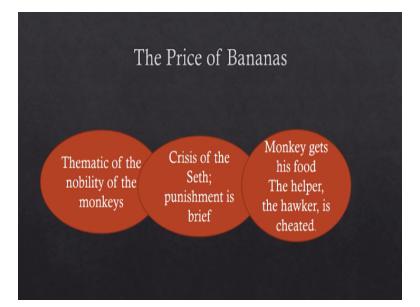
Peter Brooks, Reading for the Plot

* "the motor forces that drive the text forward, of the desires that connect narrative ends and beginnings, and make of the textual middle a highly charged field of force" (<u>xiii-xiv</u>)

Now I want to leave you with one important thought in terms of narrative structure, and this is a notion that I took from Peter Brooks is a interesting book reading for the Plot. And he says that, "the motor forces that drive the text forward, of the desires that connect narrative ends and beginnings and make of the textual middle a highly charged field of force." He—ultimately what this set of words and phrases mean is that—

There is a dominant motive, a dominant motif as well that connects or that connects beginnings and ends and it makes sense of this middle as well which becomes a highly charged field of force. So the motif or the motive is important in making sense of-- and it kind of even constructs the beginnings and ends and lays out the middle too.

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So if we keep this idea in mind and apply it to the price of bananas, what we get is that at the beginning of the narrative at the beginning of the story, we have the theme of the nobility of the monkeys in the context of the religious epics and that is clearly established and then we see the crisis of Seth where he is punished briefly by a monkey for being horrible to a Coolie.

And then the in the end we see that the monkey gets his food and then through the help of the hawker but then the helper is cheated the hawker is cheated by Seth. So-- while Seth is punished in this brief punishment it is a brief sense of justice that is happening in the context of this tradesman whereas the helper the hawker is left out, he is disappointed. Thank you for watching. I will continue in my next session.