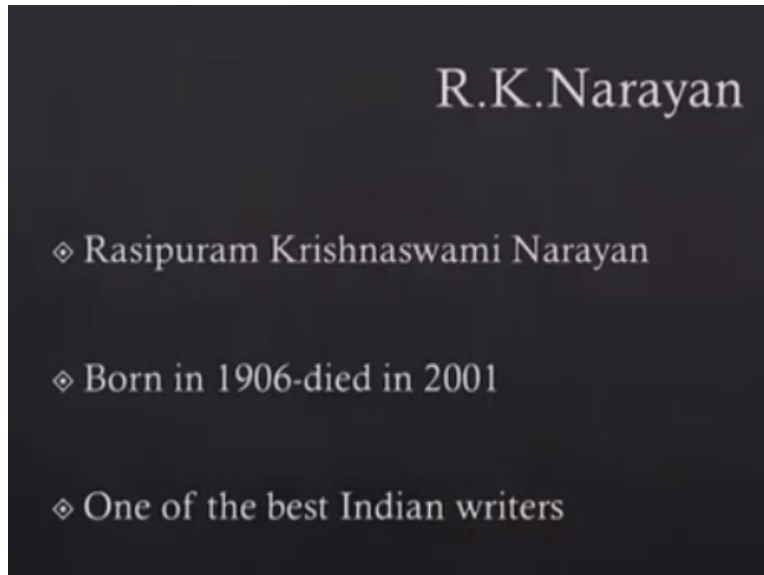


**Short Fiction in Indian Literature**  
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**Lecture - 11**  
**Plotting and Ideology in R.K. Narayan's A Horse and Two Goats - I**

Hello and welcome to week 11's lecture and it is on R. K. Narayan's A Horse and Two Goats. The title or the angle of interpretation that I am going for in terms of this particular story is plotting an ideology and how through the narrative structure through this very clever characterization and you know a weaving of the narrative trajectory R. K. Narayan is able to discuss several aspects of society and the clash between the east and west too.

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Before we begin I would like to briefly introduce India's beloved a novelist R.K. Narayan. He is originally known as Rasipuram Krishnaswami Narayan, which he shortened to R.K. Narayan and he was born in 1906 in Madras and he died in Madras in 2001 and he is one of the best-known Indian writers and he is very well known for his first work Swami and Friends published in 1935.

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R.K.Narayan

- ◆ Swami and Friends (1935)
- ◆ Fictional South Indian town, Malgudi

◆ *The English Teacher* (1945), *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955), *The Guide* (1958), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1961), *The Vendor of Sweets* (1967), and *A Tiger for Malgudi* (1983).

My Days, 1984

So it is a pre-independence work and he has constructed this frictional South Indian town called Malgudi and it has become a very well-known term in many of the households in South India especially in Tamil Nadu for more than a generation. So his autobiography is called My Days published in 1984 and his major works, his major novels include the English Teacher published in 1945, Waiting for the Mahatma 1955, The Guide a very complex psychological novel was published in 1958, The Maneater of Malgudi 1961.

Again it is a very, very menacing tale of a taxidermist and The Vendor of Sweets 1967 and a Tiger for Malgudi 1983. So these are some of his very well-known works.

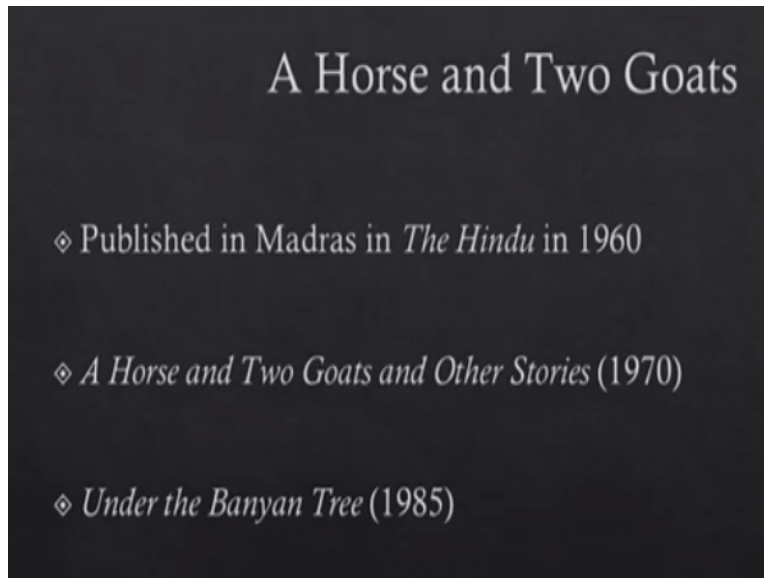
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R.K.Narayan

- ◆ Human eccentricities
- ◆ Intricacies of human bonds
- ◆ Ironies in daily life

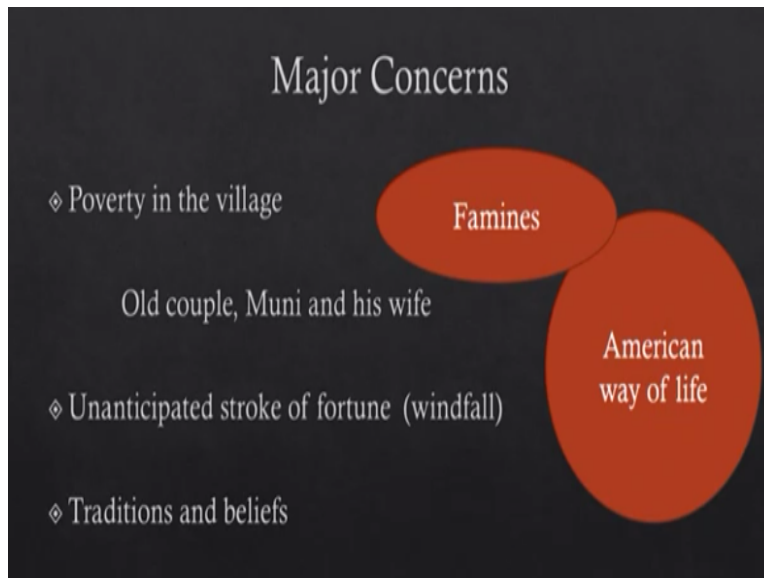
Now the major subjects of interest for R.K. Narayan in his fiction include human eccentricities and he kind of brings out the intricacies of human relationships and he also discusses the ironies in daily life and accidents and fate also play a major role in complicating and resolving his fiction.

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Now A Horse and Two Goats is a short story that was published in a Madras newspaper called The Hindu in 1960. So this is almost a mid 20th century short fiction and it was included quite later in another collection of short stories and he titled the collection A Horse and Two Goats and other stories which was published in 1970 and the same story made another appearance in another collection of R. Ka. Narayan called the Under the Banyan Tree, which was published in 1985. So this is a very well-known work of this particular Indian writer.

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now just to give you a sense of what is going to come in terms of this story, I will do a very close analysis of the plot structure and the characterization and the themes, but I would like to give you a heads up as to some of the major concerns that are going to pop up in this particular story and they are these: the poverty in the village is a major facet that R. K. Narayan introduces and something that gets somehow marginalized pushed to the periphery.

Because of the humor that is there in the story and the humor takes the center stage, but we need to keep an eye out for the poverty in the village and the complications that arise out of it and there is also mention of a series of famines in the village and that again suggests a lot of pressures on the people who do not occupy the higher strata of life and we need to remember that rural India is not a wealthy India at least in the representation that we have in R. K. Narayan's fiction.

The story is about an old couple Muni and his wife and these two figures are very, very poor and it is through a narration of their past and the present and an aspiration for their future that are the poverty of the village, the discriminations that they suffer are brought through by R. K. Narayan. Now that is one thing and the unanticipated event that happens to Muni at the end of the story is what kind of lifts the story from a kind of tragedy and a pessimistic plane to a happy one.

Because he gets a windfall a stroke of fortune at the end of the story, he gets a lot of money from an American who passes by. So we have the sense that life will turn around that the wheel will come a full circle so if you are at the bottom you will inevitably come up too. So that sense of changing fortunes is also indicated in this particular story. So we have the poverty aspect, we also have the stroke of luck that may befall anyone.

We also get a sense of the contrast between the Indian Way of life, which is embedded in the small village called Creatum as it could be pronounced from the story, because of the English at the anglicized spelling Creatum or Greedum, which means crown. So through that particular village we get a sense of the way of life of Indian villages and the name is a bit ironical, Greedum suggesting wealth and grandeur and power while there is not a lot of indication of all those aspects of grandeur evident in the life in this particular village.

As I mentioned, we also get a contrast between the Indian Way of life and the American Way of life, which represents the West the wealth of the West is contrasted with the traditional faith bound way of life of the East, where life is simple, but it is also very, very interesting and it can be humorous to at certain moments.

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Now Muni is the central figure for us and it is through this particular character that R. K. Narayan pushes the story forward. The events that befall him are the activities that he engages in

sets the ball rolling. So the third person, narrator is massively invested in this old man, Muni and he used to be a wealthy person. Some time ago when he had a flock of 40 sheep and goats and that gave him a lot of wealth once upon a time.

That once upon a time was before the time of the now with which the story begins and now Muni is not at all wealthy; it is quite the opposite he is barely getting by with his life. So it is a contrast, he has clearly fallen from the high pedestal of fortune and he is just left with two goats and he is always already in debt to the village shop man and he is also under the mistaken notion that he is 50 years of old and the shopkeeper corrects him and says that he is most probably 70.

So the ultimate aim of Muni on a daily basis is to get a decent tasty meal. So that is all he looks forward to and nothing else.

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The question of age

◆ Muni repeated weakly, not being sure of it himself, 'Fifty'. He always calculated his age from the time of the great famine when he stood as high as the parapet around the village well, but who could calculate such things accurately nowadays with so many famines occurring?

Unsure; uncertain

"more likely to be seventy"

Now I want to go back to the question of age because that is an indicator of several other things about this particular character. So Muni goes to this shopkeeper and he wants to buy a set of ingredients on credit, so that his wife can cook him a drumstick sauce and he has a real craving to eat that particular dish and he has no money. Muni has no money of course and he is hoping to get some stuff on credit and he has to humor the shopkeeper in order to get into his good works and get some stuff.

So in this conversation, the question of age comes up and Muni says that he is 50 years old. He repeated weakly not being sure of it himself, 50. He always calculated his age from the time of the great famine when he stood as high as the puppet around the village well but who could calculate such things accurately nowadays with so many famines occurring. So again it is very interesting that people in the village.

People who are not part of the urban space calculate their age according to a big natural events, climatic events and this reminds me of other texts that we have read for this story, such as the summer vacation, where nanny amma calculates the age of her child Ammani by particularly a bad storm and then we have the age of Binya calculated according to the occurrence of a big snowstorm. So again we have Moony calculating his age according to the big famine that happened ages ago.

So this is an indication of how life is unaffected by modern developments, how the villagers are somehow interacted the units which have no interventions from the modern facet that is in the urban spaces. So that is something to be noticed and the last a few words, which says that who could calculate such things accurately nowadays with so many famines occurring. So even nature has become so unpredictable and it has become harsh on the life of the villages that even they become uncertain indicators in making an account of life events.

So this uncertainty that is there about Muni's age is also associated with the uncertainty that is there in nature because nature does not give these people famines once in every 10 years, once in a particular duration, but quite often so nature is also unreliable. So this is what he says to the shopkeeper who rejects his calculation and says you are more likely to be 70. You are older than you claim to be.

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## Muni

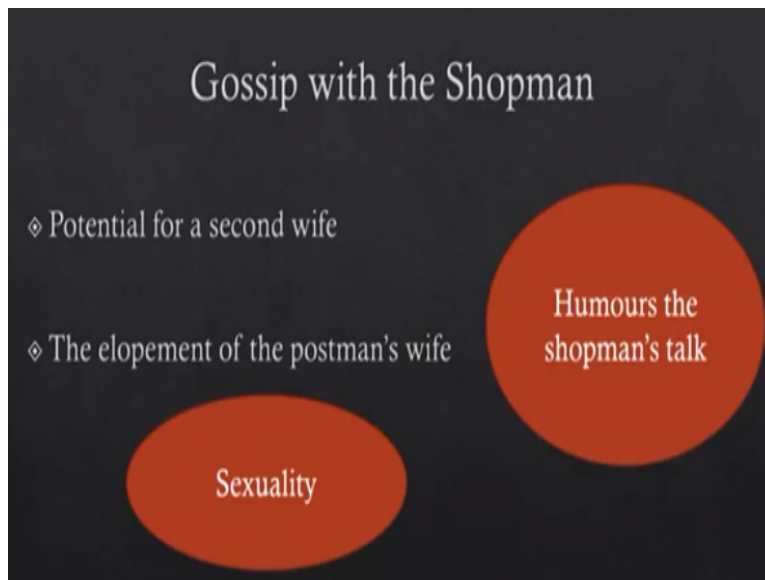
- ◇ “No children”
- ◇ Lies about a daughter
- ◇ ‘Have you a daughter?’ sneered the shopman.

Muni, so we have established the fact that he is a much older man and he has no children and very interestingly he lies about a daughter when he tells the shopkeeper that he will get money soon from a daughter, who would give him money on his 50th birthday. So which is what provokes this conversation and these set of ideas. So the shopkeeper is a bit struck by that claim and he says have you a daughter and sneering is a very interesting emotion that we have here on the part of the shopman.

As the story progresses, we get a sense barren couples do get a lot of prejudice from the rest of the village folks. So that contempt that is there in the shopman for Muni’s inability to have progeny is indicated. There is a slight hint there and here we have one of the prejudices that is slightly hinted.

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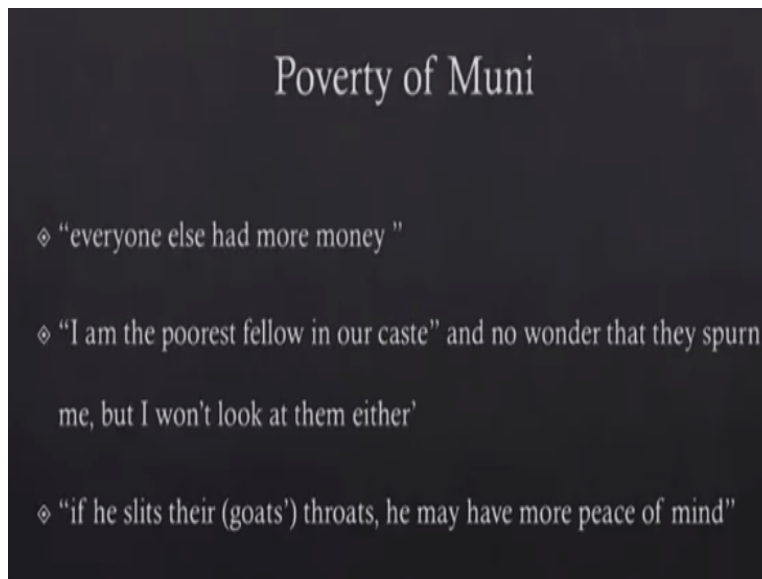
So what Muni does is he gossips with the shopman as I said to get into his good books and get some money on credit though he is unsuccessful I mean that narration is unsuccessful in getting him what he wants, that conversation is very interesting for a couple of reasons. One thing that immediately comes to my mind is conversation and it's power. So Muni thinks that a conversation which kind of endorses the viewpoint of the shopkeeper will make him happy enough to give him stuff on credit.

So that power of talk is very interesting and Muni understands that. So the other thing that is very interesting and significant for us as students of literature is the subject of the conversation between the shopman and Muni. So the shopman suggests that Muni is has the imp in him. He has too much of an imp to even have a second wife, but then the first wife is still around, so that is not possible.

Then the conversation again dwells on the elopement of a postman's wife. So if you take a good look at these topics and the topic is sexuality and Muni's sexuality in the first case and how the shopman in a manner of fun suggests that he still has you know the attraction and there is still the imp in him to have a second wife and then we have this illicit relationship between the postman's wife and someone else.

There is also the suggestion that the postman has a bad relationship with the shopkeeper in terms of things being bought by him on credit. So all these stuff which are there in the margins suggests that one of the preoccupations of the village folk are about sexuality and illicit sex. So that is another topic that comes up through the narrator's that runs through this particular story world. So the first one is the poverty and the famine and the second one is the idea of illicit relationships.

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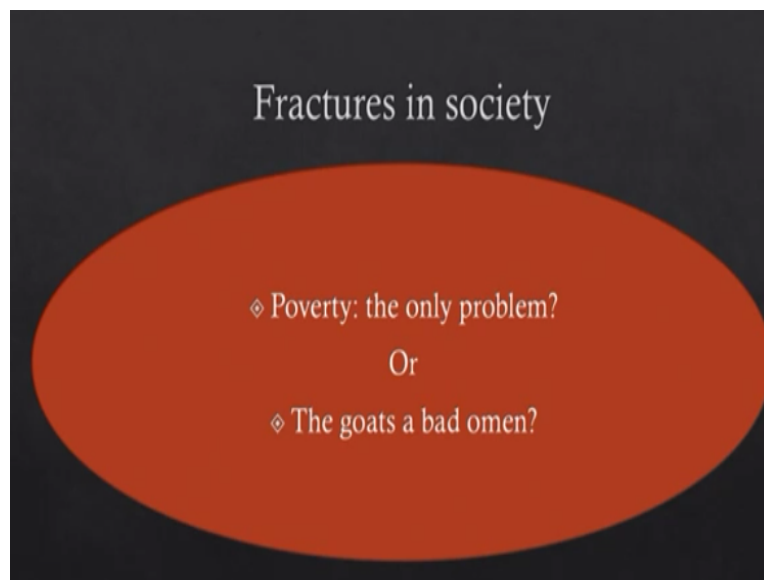
Now let us go back to this theme of the poverty of Muni and explore this a bit further because that tells us something about the relationships that he has with the rest of the society in that particular village and the narrator says that everyone else had more money than Muni. So he seems to be at the bottom of the pyramid and at the bottom of the pecking order on the social ladder in terms of wealth in that particular village.

So that in itself is making Muni a lot more self-conscious about his personality, his sense of self, his presence and position in the village. So that is something to be taken note off and again and this idea is reinforced. He says I am the poorest fellow in our caste, that particular caste name is not spelled out by the narrator, but he is the poorest in that particular community and he says that no wonder that they spurn me but I would not look at them either.

So when he is driving the two goats to make them graze by the highway and there are a bunch of villagers, a group of villagers who are chatting and they tried to get the attention of Muni, but then he would not take notice of them because he is very self-conscious and he thinks that they are spawning him because of his poverty and he says I would not look at them either. So there is a lack of a genuine connection between the members of the community, the society in this village and Muni and he is almost glad to get away from them and go to the outskirts.

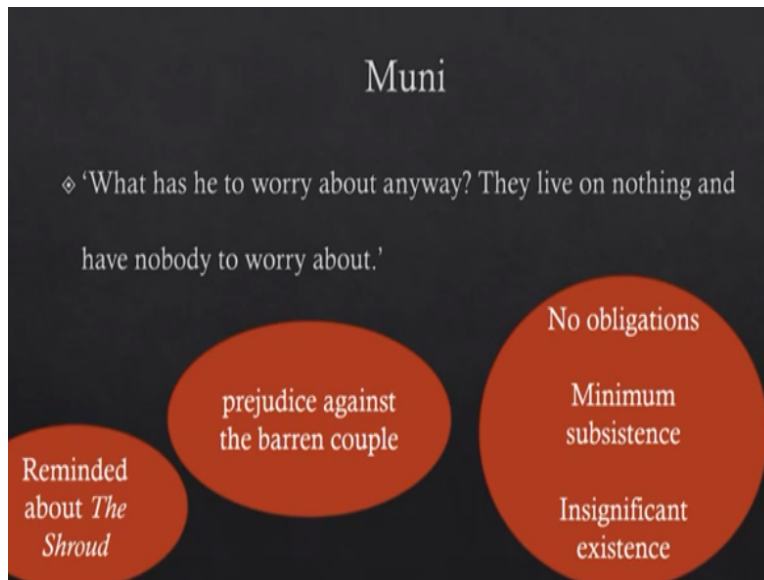
Another aspect that is interesting to understand is that the villagers think if Muni slits the goats' throats, he may have more peace of mind. So that is a significant point of view too because they think that these goats are the ones that is kind of giving him trouble. So if he gets rid of these goats he will have more peace of mind. So that seemed to be the attitude of the villagers in terms of Muni's situation. So the goats seem to have been a sort of problem for Muni.

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So why do they think that. So do they look at the goat as a kind of a bad omen, a curse and even Muni himself thinks that if they kind of get some disease and if they are out of his sight, if they die then it would be good riddance. So he has this conflicted attitude towards these goats, which are the only property that he owns.

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Now again the villagers think that Muni has nothing to worry about. He does not have any children. He leads a kind of a bare Spartan existence. So they do not have anything to worry about Muni and his wife. So this is the statement that the narrator offers to tell us about the point of view of the villagers, what has he to worry about anyway they live on nothing and have nobody to worry about.

So this set of ideas again reminded me of the shroud they especially reminded me of Ghisu and Madhav who lived on nothing almost nothing and they have nobody to worry about. So even when Budhiya is around they do not actually worry about her well-being. So the bare existence and the minimum subsistence of Muni and his wife remind me of Premchand's characters and these two figures are almost insignificant in terms of the perspective of the villagers.

So they are on the margins and even though the house is at the very end of that particular street also literally the last in line, so again the villagers think that they have no obligations they have no children, they have no property they do not even have you know sizeable food on a daily basis. So why should we care about them that seems to be the attitude going about in Greedum in this particular story.

We have also noticed a slight prejudice against the barren couple early on and that is reinforced again so just because you do not have children does not mean your suffering is all right or your

suffering is somehow immaterial or insignificant. So that idea seems to be suggested through this story in a critical fashion.

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Past as an Embedded Narrative

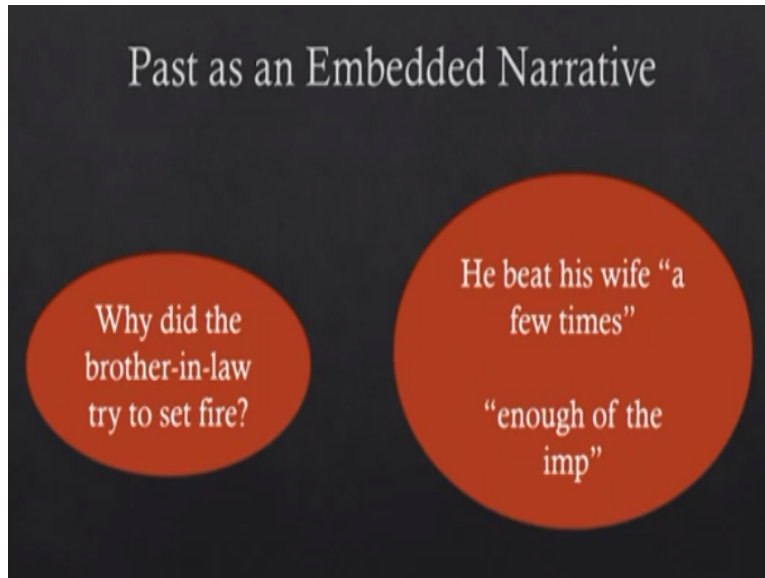
- ◆ Wealthy due to his flock of sheep
- ◆ “Famous butcher”
- ◆ “After a smoke one felt light and elated and inclined to forgive everyone including that brother-in-law of his who had once tried to set fire to his home”

Betel leaves, tobacco and bhang

So we have the past of Muni as an embedded narrative as the story progresses. So the past which tells us that Muni was an influential figure some time ago, ages ago is introduced a bit late as the story develops and the narrator tells us that he was very wealthy because of his flock of sheep, it is the fleas of the sheep are much sought after and there was a famous butcher who used to come by and get the stuff from Muni in return he also gave him a lot of beetle leaves, tobacco and bang a kind of a stimulant, an addictive substance to smoke.

That is a very interesting aspect of his life in the past. After a smoke one felt light and elated and inclined to forgive everyone including that brother-in-law of his who had once tried to set fire to his home. So that particular substance bangs when Muni smoked it with this butcher far away in a hut and unknown to the wives and well-wishers you know it gave me a great sense of elation and he was inclined to forgive almost everybody including that brother-in-law who tried to set fire to his home.

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That is a very interesting incident from his past and our question should be why on earth did the brother-in-law try to set fire to Muni's house, what could be the motive for such a bizarre action was the brother-in-law unsound of mind or was he angry with Muni for some reason, so all these motives are not mentioned in the narrative and that gives us a room for a lot of speculation and I am trying to connect this slight suggestion of the friction in relationship between the brother-in-law and Muni to Muni's relationship with his wife.

The narrator mentioned early on that he had thrashed his wife a few times quite early in their relationship, quite early in their marriage and I was just wondering whether was that the cause for the brother-in-law trying to set fire to Muni's house it's a bit of a stretch, but then I am just trying to work it out in terms of the clues that are there in the story and then there is also another suggestion made by the shopkeeper who says that Muni has enough of the imp.

The mischievous psyche character in him to go after another wife. So was this again this character characteristic of Muni that was a bit of a problem in those days and was the brother-in-law angry about it and was that the reason for setting fire to him or was this aspect of the brother-in-law born out of the jealousy he had for Muni because he was extremely wealthy. So there are so many things that we can think about in terms of this particular information that we get it from the embedded narrative.

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## Past as an Embedded Narrative

◇ But all this seemed like the memoirs of a previous birth. Some pestilence afflicted his cattle (he could of course guess who had laid his animals under a curse) and even the friendly butcher would not touch one at half the price...and now he has left with the two scraggy creatures.

Now the narrator says that these all seem like the memoirs of a previous birth. So it is so much in the past all these set of events are so much in the past, it is almost as if it is a part of a memoir of a previous birth. It is as if he does not even belong to this particular birth of Muni and some pestilence afflicted his cattle, he could of course guess who had laid his animals under a curse and even the friendly butcher would not touch one at half the price and now he was left with the two scraggy creatures.

So we have a brief description about the fall of Muni and that fall is related to the pestilence, the disease and the contagious disease that affected his cattle, his sheep. So one after the other his cattle died due to some unknown disease and importantly Muni believes that that could have been because of a curse and he almost knows who had put his animals and the curse and we can reasonably speculate and say that Muni thinks that it is his brother-in-law.

So immediately there is a fall in fortune on the part of Muni and he is just left with two scraggy creatures, thin emaciated creatures after that pestilence, which had struck his sheep. So the important stuff, important aspects that we can pick from that particular narrative and related narratives is this Muni does believe in curses.

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## Past an Embedded Narrative

◇ “curse”

◇ Village folk: The goats do not give him peace

◇ Superstition

He believes in superstition as well and the village folk also think of these two goats as some sort of evil presence or some sort of unlikely presence which does not give him a lot of peace perhaps they are a reminders of the wealth that he had once upon a time and which is why he almost kind of sneaks by the rest of the villagers when he is driving those goats to graze at the outskirts near the highway.

So he has a sense of shame and guilt and an embarrassment which could also be the reason for his sort of unhealthy relationship with the villagers. So that blame could be shared between Muni and the rest of the village folk too.

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## Muni's wife

◇ Two years younger than him

◇ “He had thrashed her only a few times in their marriage, and later she had the upper hand”.

Why? How?



Now let us quickly look at the role of Muni's wife. She is a very interesting character and the narrator says that she is two years younger than him and as I mentioned before Muni does beat her up, but only a few times in their marriage and that was before and now and later Muni says that she had the upper hand. So it is a funny comic attitude that Muni has, but then it is also very interesting that you know there is a domestic abuse.

There is violence in marriage for Muni's wife and that is something to be noted and it is also interesting to note that she does get the upper hand eventually and that is a very interesting thing in itself, why does she get the upper hand and how did she get the upper hand. So these are interesting questions and answers to which would throw a lot of light on the life of Muni, but again this is a short story and we do just get glimpses of the psyche and the soul and the life of the village in which Mooney inhabits.

The narrator says that she was old, but he was older and needed all the attention she could give him in order to be kept alive. So Muni has to do the necessary to keep her husband alive because that is her job, that is her responsibility in a traditional Indian society to sustain the husband to keep him alive as long as possible, to attend to him to take care of him and she does it in a strange manner, but she does it anyway.

She is also as the narrator tells us that she does have the upper hand in the relationship in the sense that she puts him in his place, she mocks him, she reprimands him and when Muni asks for drumsticks sauce, she mocks his desire and says that he only has four teeth and he has big desires. So it is a very interesting comment but a comment which also tells us a lot about hitting the wife's character and nature.

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## Muni's wife

- ◇ Apparently hot-tempered
- ◇ Advises fasting for Muni for the day
- ◇ Afraid of irritating or annoying her

So she is also apparently very hot-tempered and when Muni asks for that particular sauce and there is no ingredient at home and when Muni also could not get any stuff on credit from the shop, she angrily advises him to fast for the day and interestingly Muni knows his wife very well and he thinks that the best strategy is not to irritate her or annoy her and he is also even slightly afraid of her.

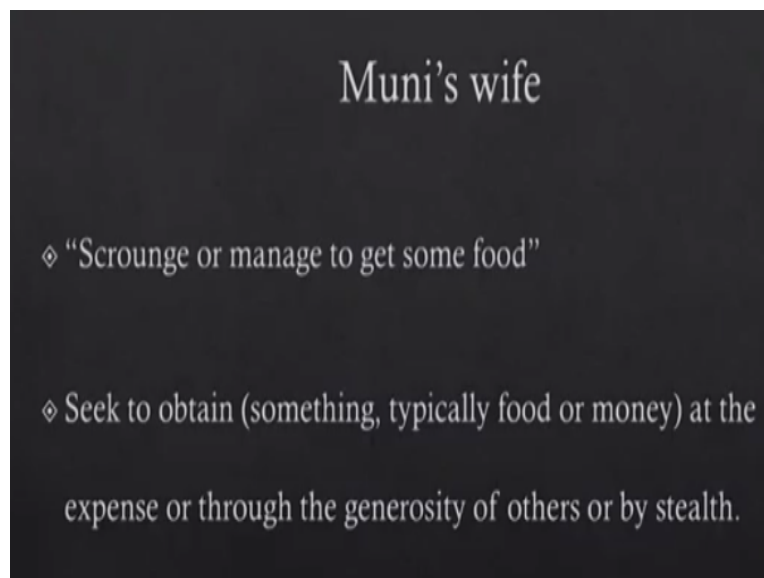
So what he does is, he quickly agrees and the narrator says that the wife could be very undependable in the morning very temperamental in the morning, you cannot predict her mood and as the day goes by her mood does improve. It is an interesting characterization but on the other hand this could be a cliché too in the sense that Indian wives are very unpredictable, easily annoyed, irritated, they have a brash exterior, but a heart of hearts, they do you know meet the needs and demands and desires of the husband.

So that cliché also comes to my mind when I look at the characterization of Muni. So Muni knows that she would surely go out and work, grind corn in the big house, sweep a scrub somewhere and enough to buy foodstuff and keep a dinner ready for him in the evening. So she could mock him, she can get angry, annoyed, she can shout at him tell him off, but at the end of the day she would have prepared a dinner and kept it ready for the husband to partake of it.

How would she source the food materials, she would sweep or do some work somewhere or she would grind corn in the big house and she would engage herself in lots of labor to make sure that there is food for the husband and this particular description of Muni's wife reminded me once again of these two figures from summer vacation nanny amma, who goes to grind aval for the grandmother mutahchi and I am also reminded of Budhia who does grind corn in the village, so that she could fill the shameless stomachs of her relative.

So the women as the laborers, the woman as the kind of caretakers of the men in the household is a theme that is communicated through the narratives that we have read for this course.

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So at one point the narrator also tells us that Muni knows that his wife would scrounge or manage to get some food at the end of the day and the word scrounge is a very interesting word because the meaning of it suggests that food especially is obtained or even money at the expense or through the generosity of others. So there is a lot of charity involved or it could be done by stealth too. So that word is pretty significant in this context.

Again I am reminded of nanny amma, who tries to steal from Muthachi the stuff of tamarind that she hides underneath the rice that she carried. So all these are interesting ideas that come through when we you know pay close attention to the meaning of words and the application of it in particular context. So what is apparent is that there is a massive burden on her shoulders and that

burden is about looking after her husband and this old woman working in the big house is also very interesting.

So no matter how old you are, you have to do some work to get by. So there is no you know retirement from work in the villages and that is kind of suggested in the story, the story from the mid 20th century. So the woman has to be constantly productive she has to interact with the rest of the society, the village society in order to be productive whereas Muni can quietly sneak away with the two goats, so that he can just go to that space near the highway and look at stuff that moves on the big Road.

So Muni's wife's role is as kind of similar Bhudiya's in The Shroud and both the women try to put food on the plate for their men folk.

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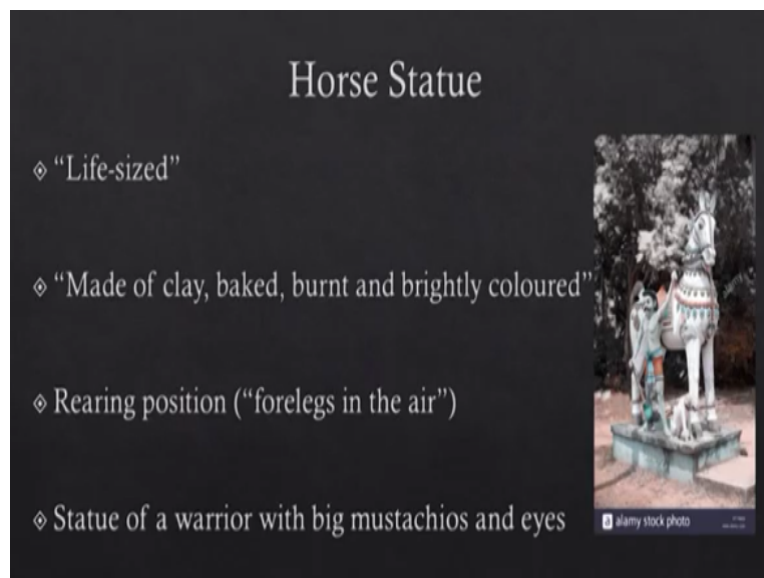
So Muni is on the outskirts while the wife slaves away in inside the big house. So what does he do when he is on that interesting pedestal which has a big life-sized statue of a horse, a clay horse and the statue of a warrior. So he sits on that pedestal and watches the vehicles on the highway and he knows by the appearance of a particular vehicle down the road that it is time to go home and enjoy the meal that the wife has prepared.

His presence on the highway or by the side of the highway gives him a great sense of peace because he does get a sense of belonging to a larger world, he realizes that this world is connected to other networks on this big world and that gives him a sense of contentment, which is not there for him inside the village. So Muni sits on the pedestal of the Statue you know all day long and he kind of moves about.

There is enough space on the pedestal to move about according to you know the sunlight that he gets from the Sun. So he moves to particular spots in order to get away from the harshness of the Sun and he also sometimes sits under the belly of the horse to get a bit of shade. So it is very interesting in the sense that the pedestal itself becomes the home for this old man. So he does not spend a lot of time indoors inside his hut.

We do not get a picture of him quite an extended picture of him inside his hut, but we do get a sense that this clay horse and the warrior somehow provide that comfort and warmth and protection from the elements for this old man in another sense the pedestal also becomes his throne, Muni's throne, because he gets a high vantage point and he sits there and looks at all the stuff that is going on about him.

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So what about this statue of the horse. It is life-size, it is a big statue and it is made of clay baked and burnt and brightly colored and it is in the rearing position so the four legs are in the air, so it

has a military air to that you know statue and again there is a warrior as well with big mustaches and eyes and the narrator comments that in those days in order to make a man scary, they made big mustaches and bulging eyes to indicate bravery and courage.

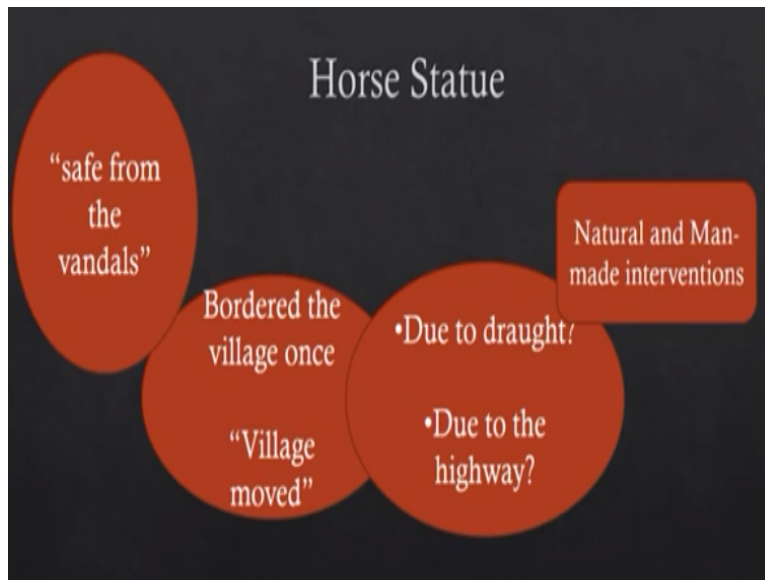
So he sits at this particular spot everyday and there is a very interesting set of description about the statue of the horse and the narrator says that the horse itself was said to have been as white as a dobhi washed sheet and had had on its back a cover of pure brocade of red and black lace matching the multicolored sash around the waist of the warrior, but none in the village remembered the splendor as no one noticed its existence.

Even Muni who spent all his waking hours at its foot never bothered to look up. So this is an extraordinary set of statues in terms of its artistic and attractive and aesthetic merit is concerned and in fact once it had its the horse had a kind of a cover which was as white as a dobhi washed sheet and it had a kind of a cover of pure brocade of red and black lace and which matched with the sash of the warrior.

So that the horse in the warrior or of a piece they go together in the sense that the horse is that of the warriors, but all the attract aspects of the horse is not noticed by the village folk because they do not have the time to enjoy the splendor. They are so preoccupied with their own concerns and daily pressures that they do not notice it and even Muni who spent a lot of his time at its foot never bothered to look up and see what are the features of this particular clay horse.

So it is a very interesting gap on the part of the cultural side of this bunch of villagers. Now this particular statue once bordered the village, but now since the village has moved further away this horse is now at the outskirts and near the highway.

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The narrator suggests that it could be due to draught or it could be due to the building of a highway and these reasons could have pushed the villagers to move away from this you know horse’s statue, but these two suggest one suggest natural intervention, nature has become very harsh therefore no rain and the people have to move away to get water and other stuff and then the other is the man-made intervention, the highway that has been built.

That particular activity chases the villagers away. So these are the two potential reasons for the village kind of distancing itself from this clay horse and the warrior, but nevertheless these statues are safe from the vandals of the village because they do not scribble, etch or make any marks on the body of these two statues and the narrator is surprised by that fact because the vandals used the walls to make vulgar comments and they kind of use the knives to even make marks on the trees in the village.

The way this statue retains its pristine condition could be due to a particular reason and that reason becomes clear later on as the story progresses.

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## Complication

- ◆ Arrival of the foreigner
- ◆ khaki –wearing American
- ◆ Struck by the Statute of the horse “Marvellous”

Now the complication in the story happens when we have a foreigner on the scene. So the arrival of foreigner complicates the peaceful existence of Muni and he arrives on the scene because his vehicle breaks down for lack of a fuel and he comes looking for help and he stops for a chat with Muni and he wears Khaki and he is an American and he is quite struck by the statue of the horse and he constantly says a marvelous, this is an absolutely marvelous statue.

Now Muni is forced to offer an introduction about himself and he does it through claiming ownership of the two goats that are grazing nearby and he points at them and the American looked faithfully in the direction indicated by Muni’s fingers, gazed for a while at the two goats and the rocks and with a puzzled expression took out his silver cigarette-case and let a cigarette. So this American obligingly looks at the direction pointed at by Muni and he lights a cigarette.

He also offers a cigarette to Muni and that breaks the eyes and that takes the fear out of Muni’s mind about this particular American, who wears khaki and that cloth is a scary outfit for Muni.

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## Complication through the American

- ◇ Humour in the encounter
- ◇ Thinks of running away
- ◇ “a policeman or a soldier”

“Yes, no”

“beware of khaki”

There is a lot of humour in the encounter between Muni and the American. Muni at first thinks of running away because he looks at this American as either a policeman or a soldier and he has this notion that one should be beware or one should be kind of be aware of a khaki wearing man and the only conversation in English that Muni has is yes, no uttered one after the other. It is a very paradoxical word, set of words that yes meaning agreement, no disagreement. So agree and disagree in the same sentence is very, very interesting and hilarious.

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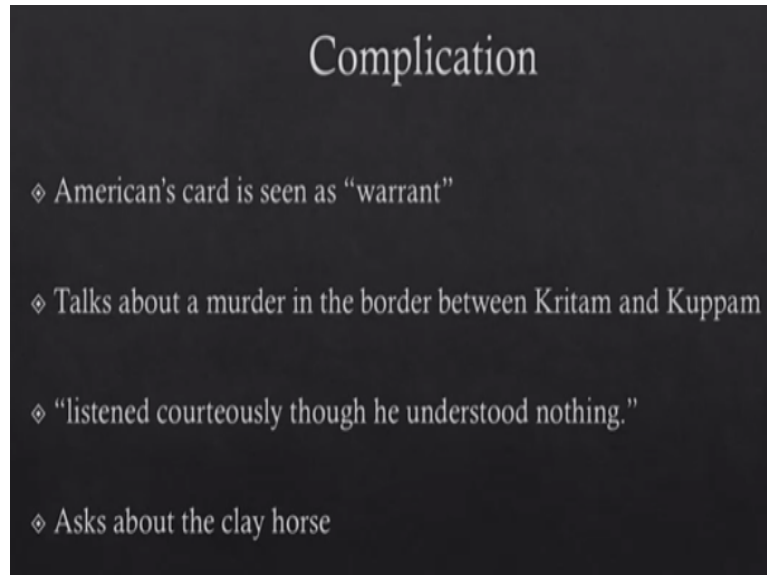
## Muni's strategy

- ◇ “talk his problem away”
- ◇ At seventy, he can't run
- ◇ “chaste Tamil”

So Muni has worked out a strategy very quickly to deal with this khaki wearing scary American. So he decides that he is going to talk his way out of the problem, which has come in the figure of this American and he realizes that he has to do this conversation thing because at 70, he can't run

away, he does not have the energy or the stamina or the physical strength to run and he is going to depend on his chaste Tamil and entertain the visitor and get away from him.

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So the American offers his visiting card to Mooney as part of his introduction and that is seen as a warrant for his arrest and he is terrified and what he does is, even though he is terrified, he is kind of confident enough to trust in his conversational abilities and he talks about a murder that took place in the border between Greedum and Kuppam, the two villages that are adjacent to each other.

He says that there was a mutilated body found beneath the tamarind tree banner admitting the tamarind tree between these two villages and while he narrates this, set of gory events the American listens courteously though he understood nothing, which is quite understandably he does not understand a word of Tamil and he has been getting by with his English across the Indian continent and all he is interested in is the clay horse and he points to the horse and tries to talk about it.

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## Complicaton

- ◊ Promises to capture any bad character
- ◊ Bury him "to his neck in a coconut pit if he tries to escape"
- ◊ Must be the other village that is to blame

The other is  
always at  
fault

So Muni funnily does not understand the intentions of the visitor and he continues with his narrative about the capture of any bad characters hanging about the village and he says that he would definitely bury him to his neck in a coconut pit, if he tried to escape. So this imaginary bad character would be caught and tied up in this interesting fashion and Muni also very confidently suggests that the other village is the one that is to blame for this particular murder.

Because their village has a clean record and what is interesting about this is that the fault is always the others, the blame is laid at the feet of the figure of the other and Muni does that quite effectively in this particular episode. So the complication in the story is humorous because we have two men, one Indian old man and we have an American probably in the middle-aged figure and we see them talking at cross-purposes.

The American tries to talk about his life in New York and you know how one day he had a power cut in his place of work and how that was a terrible time he did not have any air conditioning, he did not have any a lift to use to go up and down. So all these tiny details interesting details which apparently is a big event in his life. He talks about them to Muni and while Muni talks about his life in Greedum, his past and his Hindu believes.

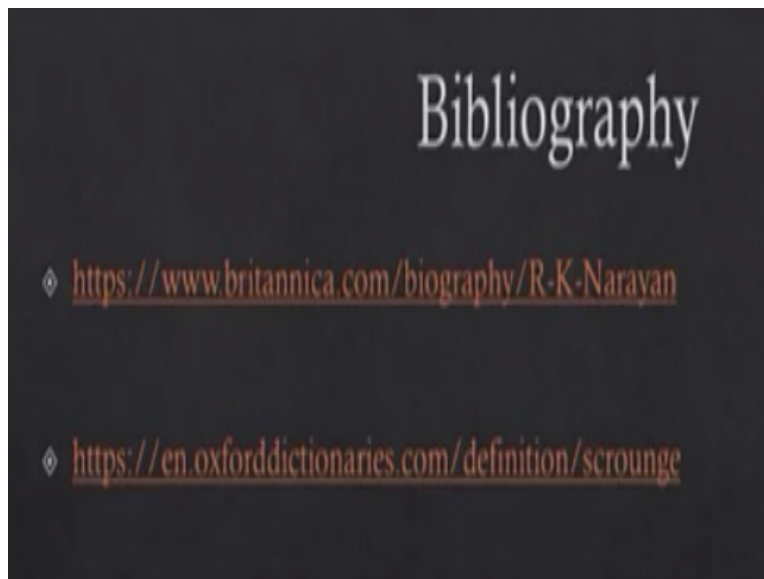
So we have two different worlds, he is living cheek-by-jowl in these narratives offered by these two different men and they are not having a conversation. They are just voicing out, spelling out

narratives of their lives and the American is desperate. He asks is there a translator around who could communicate his desires to Muni and the very interesting question that he asked is this and he asks Muni do you have any religious or spiritual scruples that prevent him from talking in English.

Because he is absolutely certain that Muni could understand English, but he deliberately refuses to communicate to him in English perhaps because of his religious or spiritual reasons which is preventing him from using the English language. That is the very interesting question to ask because this American has a sense that the Hindus, the religious folk on the land of this Indian continent are dictated, disciplined and ordered by all these religious and spiritual matters and language is one of them too.

Probably that is what his assumption is about behind that particular question.

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Thank you for watching. I will continue in the next session.