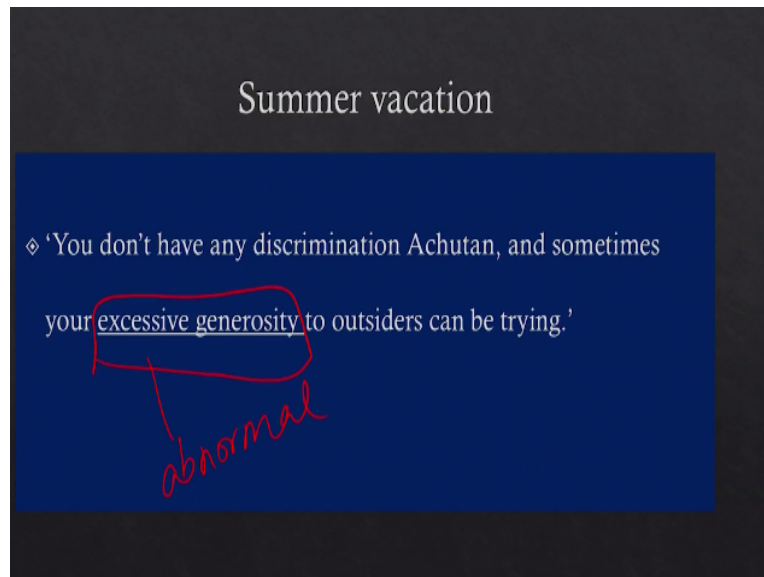


Short Fiction in Indian Literature
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Lecture-2A
Close reading Kamala Das "Summer Vacation"

Hello and welcome back to the continuation of the early lecture, so we were talking about the possibility that perhaps Muthassi is aware of (()) (00:29) of Nani Amma. So, what makes me speculate about this possibility is this.

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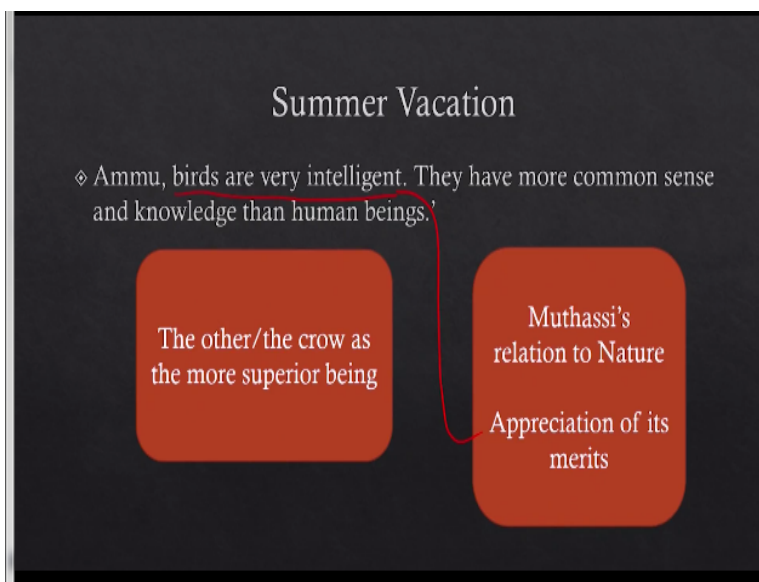
She says Muthassi says you do not have any discrimination Achutan and sometimes your excessive generosity to outside is can be trying. So, this is a scene in the story when Muthassi tells her servant Achutan to save some milk for her grandchild Ammu and be careful about the amount of milk that he pours into the coffee that he has prepared for the visiting village women.

So, the phrase that she uses here is excessive generosity, that is a very interesting phrase. And especially interest in the word excessive more than normal abnormal so which means she is alright with the write kind of generosity. So, she is not against the idea of generosity at all, but only that it should not exceed the norm. And she says the excessive generosity to outsiders, so she wants to be little bit careful about that.

She does not want the generosity to happen at the cost of the benefit of the insiders of this big house. So, bottom line is that Muthassi is a generous person and she wants to be generous as well and again that incident with Nani Amma when she refuses to offer work but then ends up offering some kind charity to Nani Amma probably she had let Nani Amma to do the pounding of the rice.

So, that she could offer some reward or some payment in kind for the work she had done, so there is generosity at play here which we should note.

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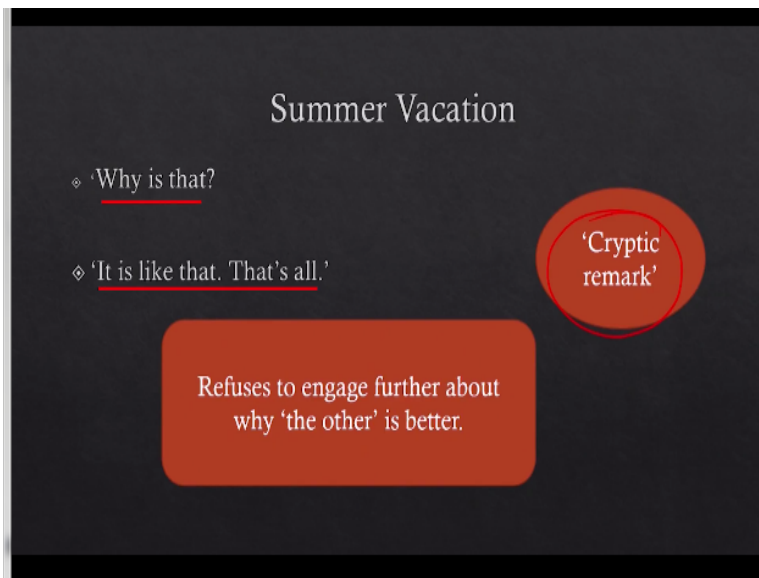


And there is also generosity of thought in Muthassi's case something we should notice despite all her graph abrupt curled behaviour to those around her and the sentence that she says Ammu birds are very intelligent . So, this idea is a very generous remark in itself the it is very interesting to see that a women can kind of offer such intelligence to aspects of nature is very very interesting.

And she says that they have more common sense and knowledge than human beings. So, she puts elements and beings in nature at a higher position than human beings. And which means if we kind of extrapolate from this comment it means the other the crow which is the other here in this particular context is the more knowledgeable creature, this is more superior being here in this context.

And the fact that Muthassi is able to appreciate this is very very interesting and gives us the clue as to her quality of mind and it also tells us that she is very much in tune with aspects of nature.

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Now Ammu asks why is that means why do crows have more common sense and knowledge than human beings, why do birds have more knowledge than human beings, it is like that says Muthassi that is all do not ask me for the rationale or the logic, she does not want to explore this common further. Because I guess at this point in the subject becomes complex and uncomfortably emotionally for her.

That is why she refuses to engage further about the other in this context. So, Ammu calls this a cryptic remark, a mysterious remark, so we might just have to speculate as to why she does not want to take this further.

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As I said there could be personal reasons, there could be social reasons, there could be cultural reasons for her refusal to make further evaluative judgments about a human beings especially the human beings that she knows personally well. So she has become uncomfortable and if Muthassi becomes uncomfortable she becomes very abrupt that is what we know from our understanding of her character in this story.

And we do have several examples of her curt or abrupt or harsh behaviour and I will give you 1 example 1 very shuttle example of her attitude.

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Summer Vacation

- ◊ 'Why Muthassi?'
- ◊ No explanation from Muthassi. Just a curt, 'That's the way I want it done. That's all.'

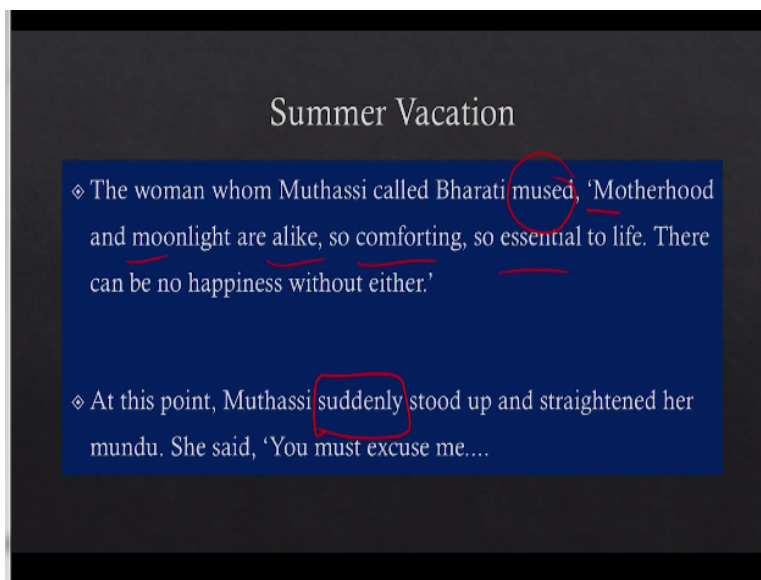
Emotional Discomfort

Explain

See this scene is about Ammu's request to have tea with the visiting women at (()) (06:21) and Muthassi says no, Ammu cannot have her tea there instead of she wants Ammu to have tea and her snacks in the kitchen. And that is what she does and Ammu is insisted why Muthassi she asks that question, no explanation from Muthassi just a curt, abrupt. That is the way I want to done, that is all.

So, this statement kind of suggests or very overtly tells us that she is putting her food down that she is being very authoritative and perhaps she wants to give of that kind of impression about to her audience. But underneath it is very possible that when she is being very abrupt and curt she is going through a lot of emotional discomfort and she does not want to offer explanations about her mental process to this child who perhaps is not at the right age who is perhaps not a mature enough to understand her reasoning.

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Now one of the possible reasons as to why Muthassi does not want to take her grandchild to (()) (07:53) is because of this particular scene which had happened before Ammu's request to have tea in (()) (08:01). So, the women who Muthassi call Bharathi mused, motherhood and moonlight are alike, so comforting, so essential to life. There can be no happiness without either.

This comment is a follow on to that earlier scene when Ammu is frightened why the threads of a mother to her baby, remember there is a moment in the story when a mother tells her difficult

child that I am going to kill you this rascal is going to get a slap and things like that and Ammu is apprehensive and she checks with her grandmother as to whether the mother would really hurt the child.

And when the women realise that Ammu makes this line of questioning because she is motherless Bharathi the women who had made threats to her own child mused, it is a very interesting choice of word to laminate to think about to reflect to speculate motherhood and moonlight are alike look at the reputation of the consonant sound there motherhood and moonlight are alike.

So, similar, so comforting, so essential to life, so 1 thing after another is added on tagged on it is almost rhetorical this passage there is a nice effect to the speech that Bharathi is making. There can be no happiness without either and again that statement is very exaggerated as well it is full of extremes there can be no happiness without motherhood or and moonlight there is finality there .

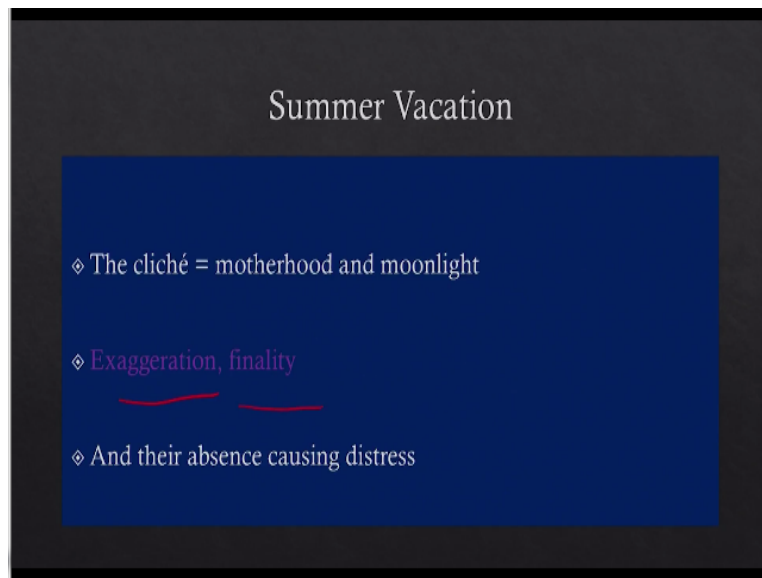
There is absolute connection and I believe that such ideas are thrown out there to create a certain effect on the group of women who are there. And at this point Muthassi suddenly stood up , for me this suddenly this adverb suddenly is the one that is very interesting, she suddenly stood up. She had not plan to get up, so she makes that move and straightened her mundu, she adjust her clothing, she said you must excuse me.

And she says that I have this recalcitrant servant this lazy servant who does not do things unless he has been ask to buy me. So, I have to go and check-in on him, so and she takes importantly she takes Ammu away from these group of women. So, this is the setup , what is very interesting is that Muthassi reacts in a jarring manner and that is what is interesting about her personality whenever she becomes emotionally uncomfortable, upset.

She removes herself or Ammu from that particular scene in a jarring manner, again I want to go back to that cliché about motherhood and moonlight and it is very interesting how the village women and Achutan calls them the gossips of the village. And he said that he does not like to

gossip, so just go by the house every house in the village and chatter and make conversation and this attitude of the gossips it is very interesting because they work with stereotypes.

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They work with cliché and Muthassi does not like that and we got an evidence of that right at the beginning when these women when they visit they ask is this your daughter's child and Muthassi is kind of annoyed by that cliché question yes of course she is my daughter's child who is child would I have in my house and that tells you that she is not one to make polite chitchat and you know load questions and cliché questions she wants to get right at the heart of the matter.

So, as I said there is a lot of exaggeration and finality in that talk by Bharathi and it is full of cultural stereotypes and this cultural stereotype of the absence of the mother I am not going to go about the absence of the moonlight. Because that is completely nonsensical but at least in **in** the context of this particular literary work. So, the absence of the mother is what is very interesting because that is an exaggeration.

But even that exaggeration has grain of truth because the absence of mother's does cause a problem in Ammu's psyche.

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Summer Vacation

- ♦ Target = Ammu, the motherless child
- ♦ Muthassi protects her by strategy

Removing her
from their
spatiality

So, if we assess that speech by Bharathi we understand that the target of that stereotypical remark is Ammu, the women of the village this particular gossip within quotes Bharathi has Ammu as her target and she attacks this motherless child and kind of highlights the distress that this child is possibly suffering because of the absence of her mother.

And Muthassi quite rightly gets upset and how does she protect her, he protects her by removing her granddaughter from the scene. And also from their speciality and she makes sure that Ammu does not visit them again in (()) (14:06) when they are going to have their tea there.

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Summer Vacation

- ♦ Absence of the mother is problematic
- ♦ Never once overtly referred
- ♦ Obsession with her grandmother's survival

Exaggeration
and grain of
truth

Now as I said exaggerations are there in that comment by Bharathi the village women but every exaggeration also possibly may have a grain of truth. And it is very interesting that even though the others notice especially the village women notice the fact that Ammu is motherless. The absence of the mother is never overtly referred to there is one moment in the story when grandmother says that you know her Kamalam whom we can assume is the daughter of Muthassi had died young.

And apart from that one reference and Velayutham comment that he is missing his wife, he does not again mention the name apart from that remark by Velayutham who says that he is finding it difficult to visit the house because it has memories of his wife and the mother is never mentioned by Ammu herself who is narrating this story.

So, there is a very conspicuous absence of the mother figure in the consciousness of Ammu and instead of the mother she is obsessing with her grandmother and her survival seems to be the most important worry that she has in her young life.

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Summer Vacation

- ♦ Muthassi is all alone; except when Ammu visits
- ♦ Ammu's home is also evidently broken
- ♦ Velayudha Menon is obviously heartbroken

Happy domesticities are absent

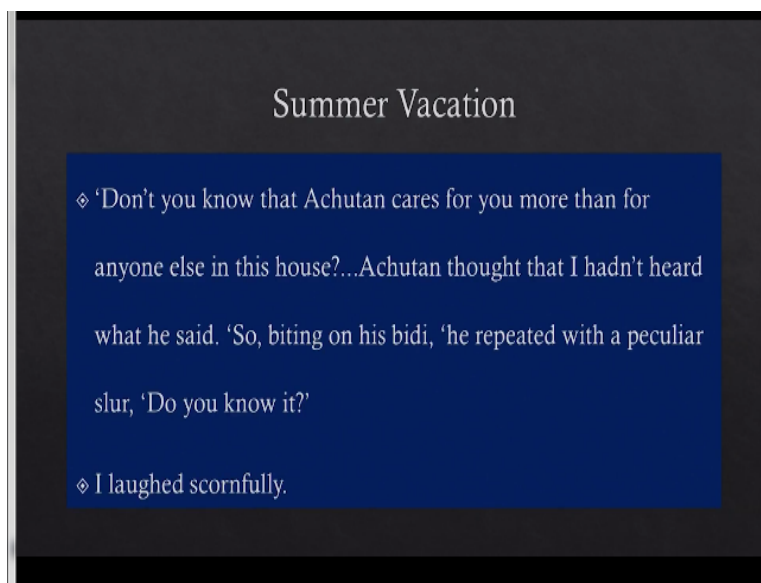
So, you know the interesting and the next consequence of this kind of analysis is to think about domesticities what kind of domesticity is present in this story, do we have happy homes, do we have unhappy homes do we have dysfunctional homes and things like that. So, if we look at this

story from the point of view of domesticity we can immediately descend that Muthassi lives most of her time all alone.

All alone in the sense that she does not have any family member residing with her in that target in that big house. And except when Ammu visits, she is quite isolated, so there is not a quite happy family structure in that household and Ammu's home is also evidently broken. Because of the absent mother and we can also sends that Velayutham has not yet adequately recovered from the loss from the massive loss that he has undergone.

Because his parting thoughts, his parting words to his mother-in-law clearly suggest that he has an cope with his wife's death and he finds it very very difficult to visit the visit her family house which is why he has been postponing the visit and he promises his mother-in-law that maybe next year I would come by, so please do not take it a mess. So, there is a clear suggestion on the basis of all these evidences that happy domesticities happy families are absent in the story.

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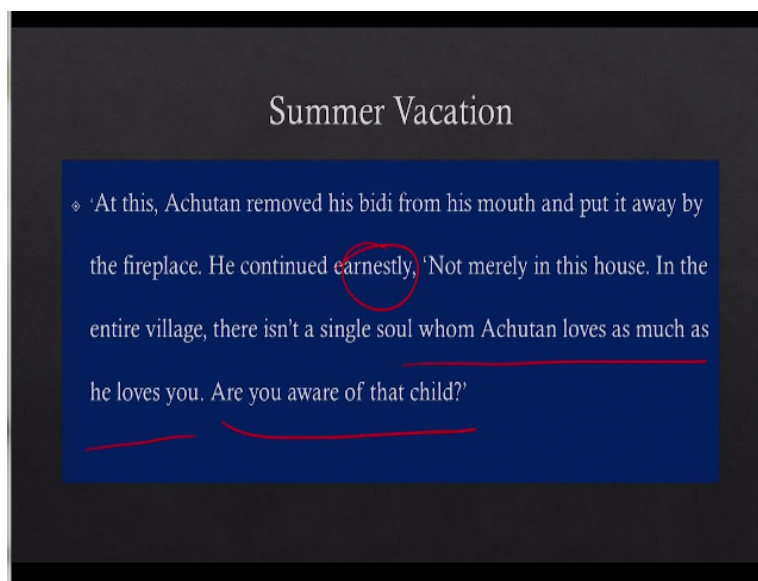
Now I want to pick up on this idea of exaggeration and kind of trace the grain of truth in that thread of exaggeration. And I want to pick up on the example of Achutan because she also makes sudden set of interesting remarks about his attitude towards Ammu. He says do not you know that Achutan cares for you more than for any one else in this house, Achutan thought that I had not heard what he said.

So, biting on his bidi, he repeated with a peculiar slur, do you know it? I laughed scornfully. So, this except is taken from the scene when the grandmother leaves the kitchen to go to Tekani and have tea with a village women. So, Achutan and Ammu are on their own in the kitchen and she is sitting on the steps leading to the kitchen and the servant makes these comments.

And he says that I care more for you Ammu then for anyone else in the house, that is also very extreme statement and Ammu does not respond Achutan taught I had not heard, she says that he thinks that she has not heard that interesting and significant comment. So, he biting on his beedi he repeated, he makes the comment again with a peculiar slur again a very interesting phrase do you know it, I laughed scornfully.

At this Achutan removed his beedi from his mouth and put it away by the fireplace. So, he once be very serious, so he takes out his cigar. And then he continued honestly, seriously not merely in this house in the entire village there is not a single sole whom Achutan loves as much as he loves you.

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Again a very very exaggerated statement I do not love anybody else except you not only in this house but in the entire village and he asks this question again are you aware of that child.

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Summer Vacation

♦ Slur

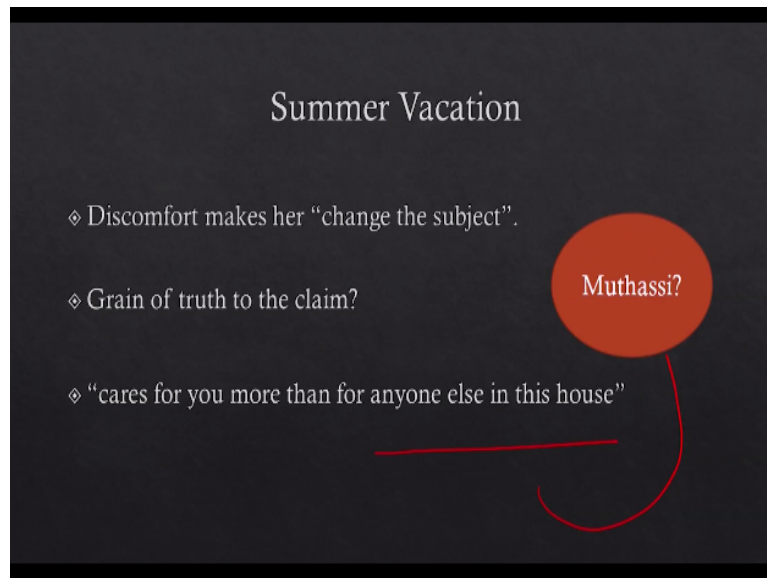
♦ “To pronounce the sounds of a word in a way that is wrong or not clear”

♦ Peculiar?

Now what do we make of this exaggeration clearly Ammu the recipient of these declarations distress the claim and how does he responds, she responds by laughing at him scornfully. She does not clearly believe him and that is very easy to understand why she does not believe that exaggerated from her. He is a servant and she is the heir to the household and the claim of the servant who is not a family member is something that one can easily distressed.

The other thing that I want to pick up on in that extract is the peculiar slur, peculiar means strange something out of the ordinary. Something that is not the norm, slur what is the meaning of slur it means to pronounce the sounds of a word in a way that is wrong or not clear sometimes we use this word in the context of drunks, drunks usually slur their words. Because in that condition in that inebriated condition they are unable to pronounce the words clearly.

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Now the other way interesting thing to notice about that exchange is that Ammu becomes uncomfortable when she hears that declaration of love by the servant that declaration of affection familial affection on the part of the servant and what does she do, she immediately changes the subject by asking where were you born and questions of that sort. So, any pronunciation that is not very clear can be commented on as a slurry of the words.

So, we can see a connection here between Ammu and Muthassi both of them seeing to adopt similar strategies here when they become uncomfortable they change the subject or just or they leave the space. So, they have different ways of coping with uncomfortable topics, they do not want to address them to the last point but they want to deal with it through a kind of an escape strategy Muthassi does it by you know abruptly leaving the space and Ammu does it by changing the subject.

But a question to ask is **is** there a grain of truth to the claim. He says that I care for you more than for anyone else in the house, if he says that then our question would be how about Muthassi does not he care for her as much as he cares for this little girl. His answer is no that is the implication to that statement and Muthassi is his immediate boss, the current boss, the one who runs this household, one who gives him the pay. So, he says that he does not care for her as much as he cares for the little girl.

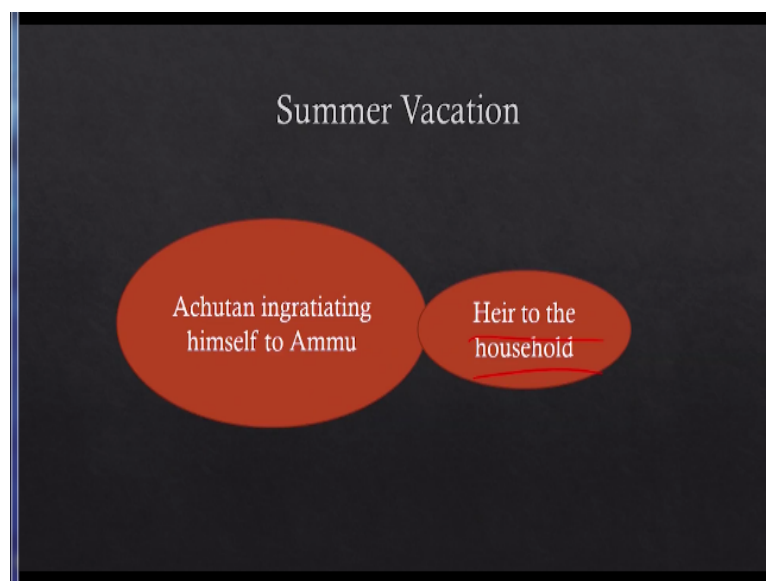
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So, this expert tells us that he is possibly communicating important vital information to this kid in an indirect way. And if we connect this attitude to the sly and knowing grin that he sports every time Muthassi finds faults with him and if we realise that this line knowing grin is directed at Ammu we kind of understand and confirm that he is mocking Muthassi the current owner of the (()) (24:05).

And he is kind of communicating the idea that the current owner is outdated and the new owner should probably realise that that he is very modern not very old fashioned.

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So, in we can also look at it in another way in a more direct way and see Achutan has ingratiating himself to Ammu, he is trying to please Ammu, he is trying to flatter Ammu who is the heir to the household who is the next heir to the Tarawad. So, if he is ingratiating himself to Ammu when probably he is doing it in the wrong way because we have seen it in the earlier lecture that Ammu is not displeased with his manner of responding to Muthassi.

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Now again let us go back to the claim that he loves Ammu the best in this entire village he probably has a reason for doing that perhaps because Ammu who would become the next heir would be his source of suspense, she would continue to employ him when she takes on charge as the next Tarawad of this big house and which is probably why he has convinced himself that he has great affection for Ammu.

And he communicates that fact to Ammu, so that she can understand that she can you know retain his service when the Muthassi when the grandmother is no longer around when she has passed away.

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Summer Vacation

- ◇ “The mundu that he was wearing was as black as the kitchen walls”
- ◇ Dirt = poverty/powerlessness

Now let us look at some specific information about this servant figure Amma when she walks into the kitchen with Muthassi notices that the mundu that he was wearing was as black as the kitchen walls, so it is very theoretic and so are the kitchen walls which is again very interesting and what is this signify the focus here is on his mundu the waste cloth.

And the dirt on it is comparable to is a kind of a symbol for the poverty and the powerlessness that Achutan has. So, there is a symbolic significance to the dirty mundu and this condition of the mundu makes us again think about another very dirty object that is referenced by Muthassi and that is the hurricane lamp that is hung near the fireplace.

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Summer Vacation

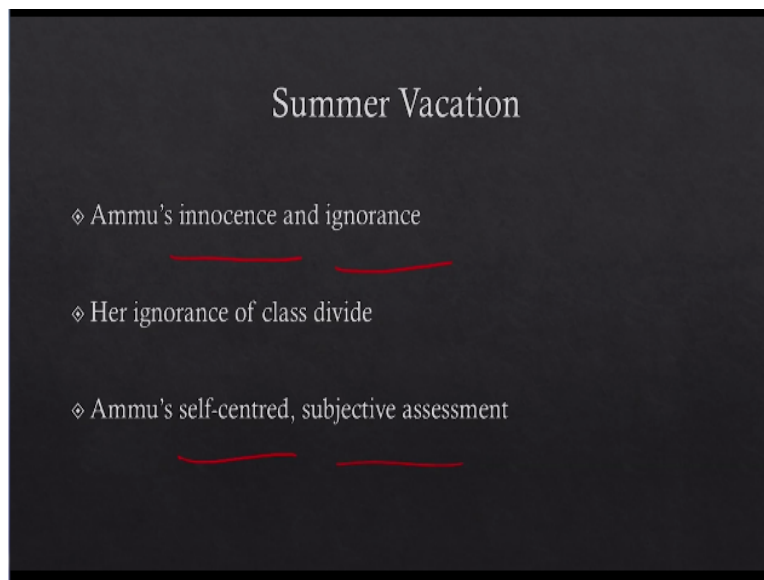
- ◇ ‘Can’t you clean this lamp at least once in a while? ...’
- ◇ ‘I did try to clean and polish that lamp,’ Achutan replied.

Lamp as
symbol for
Achutan

And the grandmother when she comes into the kitchen says cannot you clean this lamp at least once in a while. So, this lamp is also extremely dirty just as the mundu of Achutan and he says I did try to clean and polish that lamp Achutan replied and but that it did not work the lamp has to the lamp shade has to be replaced. He says the glass needs replacing.

So, perhaps the mundu that Achutan is wearing also does need replacing it is past cleaning and if he continue to retain it maybe it is possibly because he is not rich enough, he is not financially capable of doing that yet. So, these are some of the associations that creep into our reading of certain characters if we do a very close reading of certain passages in the text.

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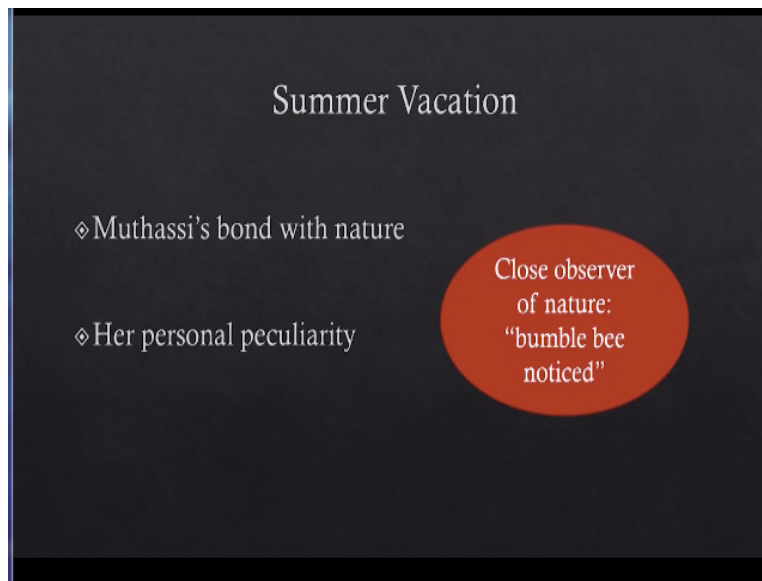


Now we had began our close reading with that particular passage about a soap, a piece of soap in a soap dish and Muthassi's relief that it has not been stolen by a crow. Now in that process of close reading we are able to gather so many thematic threads which connect the attitudes of the 2, 3 characters Ammu and Muthassi what the other characters who navigate this fictional landscape.

And that is one of the joys of close reading as well as one of the benefits of close reading to that you are able to come up with several you know connections to the rest of the canvas. So, that particular except establishes Ammu's innocence and as well as her ignorance about several things in society especially in a rural society she is also very ignorant of the class divide.

And that is suggest that she has been brought up in a very protected environment an environment that does not really give her a window into the disparities that are there in society which again explains her very self centred and subjective assessment of events and things and people that are who are around her . So, we kind of get a sense of who Ammu is as a figure in this particular story.

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We also get a very good understanding of Muthassi the central character in the story around whom the story revolves. And how bond with nature is also established her really insightful understanding of how things work in nature, what are the things that a crow can be attracted to and there is another scene in the story when Muthassi and Ammu are in a veranda.

And she is reading excerpts from the Ramayana to the little girl and she hears the bumblebee and by it is very sound Muthassi is able to suggest that the bumblebee is building an nest. So, you can see how close in communion that she is with a elements of nature and also the fact that she can attribute really positive qualities to creatures in the natural world also tells us that she is a very generous character too.

That she can attribute higher qualities to beings that are not part of her own society. We also get to understand through this close reading her peculiar personality one that you know reacts in distinct ways to threads, to emotional threads that come at her. And at her granddaughter.

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Because she has a good understanding of different kinds of people and she also has a good understanding of human beings versus non human beings and that difference that comparative understanding can also be extrapolated to comment that she is a generous enough to put the other before the self and the other need not always be an inferior the other can be superior.

And one can be generous enough and broadminded enough to accept that higher difference that difference between the self and the other.

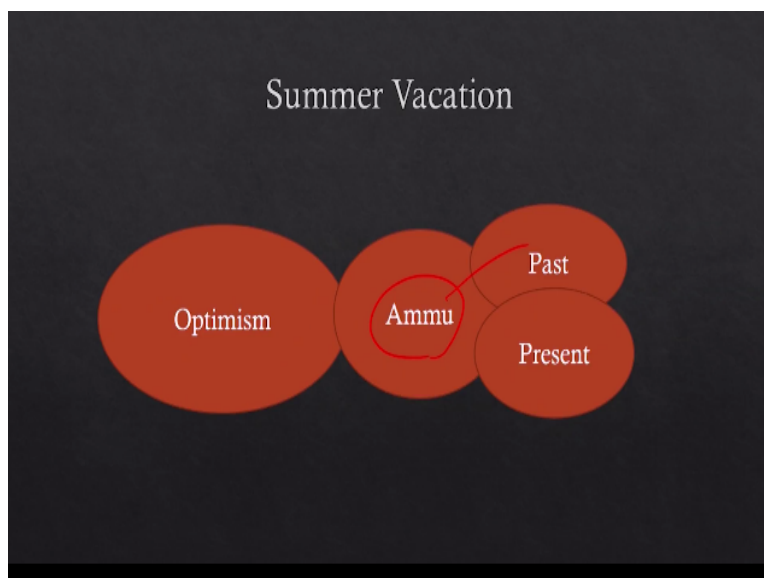
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Now summer vacation is a story which is about loss, a loss of different kinds it is also about suffering and again different kinds of suffering and there is a physical suffering there is emotional suffering and the story is also about anxiety more importantly the anxiety of Ammu kind of permeates the entire story the anxiety that her Muthassi would die before she would come back for a vacation the next year.

And finally it is also about hope about a good future a hope about the possibility of her Muthassi survival and despite all these sufferings and laws of personal bonds, financial hot chips and emotional complications. This element of hope is stressed frequently through Ammu.

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And as I said there is optimism reinforced by this central young female character Ammu who is aware of the past . The past that is dying and is about to die and that is embodied in the figure of the grandmother, the novel 3 and of the dry leaf and other things. But she is insistent and persistent and she does not want to let the past go when the present is unfolding, she wants to take the past along with her which is why in the final lines of the story.

The wheels of train, the wheels of an inanimate thing that monster of modern technology that train. And has it is wheel stand , the Muthassi will never die, Muthassi will never die, thank you for watching, I will catch up with you in the next lecture.