

**Twentieth-Century Fiction**  
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**Lecture – 58**  
**The Chess Players – Part 3**

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Hazrat Hussain. You would see me dead if you went there.' But the begum was in no mood to listen. She walked up to the *dewan khana*, but she stopped. She wouldn't go in, in the presence of an outsider. She looked in but there was no one there. Mir sahib had displaced a few pieces on the board and had gone out for a stroll to show his innocence. The begum went inside and overturned the chessboard, threw some chessmen under the dewan and a few others out through the door. Then she shut the door and bolted it from inside. Mir sahib saw the chessmen being thrown out and heard the sound of bangles, and the door being bolted. Realizing that the begum was inflamed he slunk away.

Mirza sahib said to his begum, 'You've been terrible.'

The begum retorted, 'If Mir sahib comes here, I shall drive him away from the doorstep. Had he devoted himself to God like this he would have become a saint. You keep playing chess and I remain enslaved to the domestic chores. Are you going to the hakim, or are you still unwilling?'

Mirza came out, but instead of going to the hakim he went straight to Mir sahib's and narrated the whole story.

Mir sahib replied, 'When I saw the chessmen being thrown out, I understood everything and ran. She seems so hot-tempered! But you have pampered her so much. This is not good. Why should she bother what you do outside? It is her duty to manage the household. Why should she worry about what you do?'

'Never mind,' said Mirza, 'Where shall we play now?'

'Why worry? This is a big house. We can play anywhere here.'

'But how shall I make the begum accept this? When I sat at home she kept on creating trouble. Now if I sit here she won't let me breathe.'

'Let her shout. She'll get used to it in a few days. But from now onwards be a little tough with her.'



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at Munshi Premchand's short story, The Chess Players. So, hopefully we finish this story and the entire course in a couple of lectures from now. So, I will just go back to the point in which we left off last time. We obviously, talked about the two men, the two very irresponsible men who spend all the time indulge in playing chess taking them away from work also homely domestic, political, cultural, social responsibilities.

So, the game of chess becomes a very symbolic departure from all responsible action from all responsible activity and rather at the very inception of the story we were told that the kind of culture which is projected here in Lucknow and this kingdom was one of indulgence, was one of hedonism, was very Epicurean in many ways. So, there is no real responsibility at a political level at a social level, at a cultural level and then we see the same thing happening at a domestic personal level right. So, there is a complete lack of responsibility.

And, what that does is obviously, it makes the condition of woman even worse because obviously, they are marginalized as women they do not have any real agency in a political space, they do not have access to any privilege, they do not have access to any money or any political position or power. But what gets even worse what makes it even worse is how they are treated inside their own homes. So, the whole idea of sending away the woman from the chess room becomes a very symbolic gesture. It is like sending away the woman from the public space because the chess room over here becomes a quasi public space in the house.

So, even inside the house we have different mappings, different discursive, spatial mappings right and the spatial mapping is important in terms of locations. So, who has access to what space - the women they do not have access to the drawing room which is a space, the dewan khana which is a space where the men come and play chess, where the men come and talk about the important things in the world right. So, the women stay inside, they send for they send the messages through the servants to the dewan khana etcetera.

So, the point in which we stopped last time we have find that how Mirza's wife actually enacts you know a very subversive you know gesture by walking in the dewan khana and toppling the chessboard. And, Mir, obviously, was away, Mir had slunk away out of fear and Mirza had gone out to get some medicine for his wife and then she had come in at that point and basically toppled the whole board and that becomes obviously, a subversive act. And, the act of subversion here is obviously, couched, engendered you know quotient right.

And, now, we find that the replication of this is quite tragic, the replication of this is quite sad and quite it is reflective in a way of the condition of women at that point of time. So, we will just come back to the text and this should be on your screen.

Mirza sahib said to the begum, 'You've been terrible.' The begum retorted, 'If Mir sahib comes here, I shall drive him away from the doorsteps. Had he devoted half himself to God like this he would have become a saint. You keep playing chess and I remain enslaved in the domestic chores. Are you going to go, are you going to the hakim or are you still unwilling?' Right.

So, the hakim obviously, being a doctor, the local doctor you know that she is sending him to get some medicine for her headache. Now, obviously, Mir over here is a senior person and as we were told there is a hierarchical chain of command, hierarchical chain of order and chain of prestige. So, this very feudal culture Mir is some several notches above Mirza. So, technically according to Mirza you know Mir comes to play chess and Mirza cannot refuse because he is high up in the ladder, but the wife over here it is completely you know is completely irritated and she does not want anything to do with this at all.

So, she wants an intervention over here. So, she says if you cannot drive him away I will drive him away which is again a very subversive thing to say for a woman to go to a stranger a strange man and not her husband and ask him to leave the house or tell him anything for the matter. It is almost unimaginable in this kind of a very regressive society ok.

Mirza came out, but instead of going to the hakim he went straight to Mir sahib's and narrated the whole story. So, again look at the priority over here. So, going to the hakim was a reason why he left home because his wife is sick, but instead of going to the hakim to get medicine instead of going to the pharmacy to get medicine he goes to Mir's house and narrates the whole story to him.

So, you know I mentioned in the very beginning of the story how one could if one is interested read almost the homoerotic perspective into this whole thing; how these two men have this very intimate space with each other and how the women become a problem for them and how to get, how they want to get rid of the woman in some ways and the game of chess becomes a proxy activity for maybe an erotic relationship, maybe an intimate relationship. It is definitely an intimate relationship and towards the end of the story you find how the two men run away together to play chess. They go to the fringes of the kingdom to find one secluded spot where they can have the rendezvous for this game of chess ok.

And, then before that we see over here that Mirza instead of going to the pharmacy to get medicine for his doctor for his wife he goes to Mir sahib and apologizes to him and narrates the whole story to him. Mir sahib replied, When I saw the chessman being thrown out, I understood everything and ran. She seems so hot-tempered! But you have

pampered her too much, so much. This is not, this is not good. Why should she bother you what you do outside? It is her duty to manage the household. Why should she worry about what you do?

So, this gives a very clear and very tragic idea obviously, of the tragedy of woman in this kind of a cultural a very regressive cultural setting where the woman's duty is just to stay at home and manage the household. So, she should have no agency whatsoever to come out of her little bedroom out of her kitchen and come to the husband to tell her tell him what to do. So, the very fact that she had chosen you know she chose to do it she came up and you know and she dismantled the chessboard that becomes almost like a sacrilege you know a transgression in terms of a right.

So, you know Mir is now reminding Mirza that you have pampered her too much, you have spoiled her too much. You have given her too much freedom how could she act like this. Here is a job to manage the household; she is the woman of the house. So, you know she has overstepped her boundaries she has overstepped her limits and that idea of overstepping that idea of transgression obviously, goes on to show the very limited condition of women at that time, the limits were drawn in a very defined kind of a way.

And, any act of overstepping was always an act of transgression and that was frowned upon and that was looked down upon as something very undesirable right. So, that becomes an important thing over here and you know we have been told Mirza has been told it is her duty to manage the household. So, what is she doing outside of her little drawing room, little bedroom, little kitchen that is where she belongs. She should not come out the kitchen at all.

Never mind, said Mirza, Where shall we play now? Why worry? This is a big house. We can play anywhere here. So, again this game of chess and it is almost like you know if you remember we did Eliot's Wasteland, over there too, a game of chess was a metaphor for inaction. You know that line from Wasteland we should play a game of chess, press lidless eyes and waiting for a knock upon the door right.

So, the whole idea of a game of chess becomes a proxy activity for not doing something, it is an activity for procrastination, it is an activity in action of inaction. So, you are doing inaction in order not to do any real action. So, the game of chess in Eliot becomes a proxy activity, a procrastinating activity for not doing anything real.

Then over here it is slightly different. It is it could be seen again as procrastination of course, it is something they are doing not to do anything else. But, then also there is a degree of almost erotic pleasure almost an intimate pleasure in terms of finding out a space where they can play a game of chess. Now, the two lovers almost lovers they are telling each other now that we have been ousted from one house, the guardian saw us and asked us go away where should we play now and then Mir says oh this is a big house we can play anywhere here.

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good. Why should she bother what you do outside? It is her duty to manage the household. Why should she worry about what you do?"

"Never mind," said Mirza, "Where shall we play now?"

"Why worry? This is a big house. We can play anywhere here."



"But how shall I make the begum accept this? When I sat at home she kept on creating trouble. Now if I sit here she won't let me breathe."

"Let her shout. She'll get used to it in a few days. But from now onwards be a little tough with her."

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For some unknown reason Mir sahib's begum preferred to have her husband away from home. That's why she never objected to Mir sahib's love of chess, so much so that if Mir sahib delayed going out she would remind him. Because of this Mir sahib was under the illusion that his wife was very courteous and sober. But when the chessboard was spread in the *devan khana* and Mir sahib stopped going out, the begum became edgy. Her freedom was curtailed. She hardly had any chance to have a glimpse of the outside.

And there was murmuring and whispering among the servants. Up till now they had sat idle, warding off flies. They were never bothered by guests. But now they had to take orders the whole day. Now to fetch paans, now sweets. And the hookah kept smouldering like a lover's heart. They would go and complain to begum sahiba. "Mirza sahib's chess has become a nuisance. Running about to execute orders, our feet are blistered. What sort of a game is this that goes on from morning till evening! It should be enough to play a game for an hour or two. But we can't complain. We're his slaves and have to obey the orders. But this game is evil. The person playing it never prospers. A misfortune is bound to fall upon such a house. So much so that we have seen whole neighbourhoods being



But how shall I make the begum accept this? When I sat at home she kept on creating trouble. Now if I sit here she won't let me breathe.

Let her shout. She'll get used to it in a few days. But from now on onwards I will be just, be a bit little tough with her.

So, again I mean look at this is like a complete man talk, a very regressive, disgusting man talk where one man tells another man you know you are just letting a woman go too much. You are giving her too much of you know long leash. So, control her, reign her in, make her show her where she stands, show her the limits. So, be hard on her, be tough on her etcetera. So, that kind of a rhetoric obviously, is very offensive, but then it is also reflective of the culture at that time, where a woman had zero agency in a public space, but also in the private space they were just supposed to carry out the duties for the pleasure of the husband.

So, they were just a property of the husband in terms of doing things, household chores - which had to be done only by the woman where the husband was completely free to do whatever they wanted to outside the house whoever they wanted to see, wherever they wanted to go, whatever they wanted to do. So, he had absolute agency in a political space and a public space also in a private space right. So, this little conversation despite the offensive quality is a very authentic reflection of the culture of the time and the condition of women in that kind of a culture.

For some unknown reason Mir sahib's begum preferred to have her husband away from home. That's why she never objected to Mir sahib's love of chess, so much so that if Mir sahib delayed going out she would remind him. Because of this Mir sahib was under the impression, under the illusion that his wife was very courteous and sober. But when the chessboard was spread in the dewan khana and Mir sahib stopped going out, the begum became edgy. Her freedom was curtailed. She hardly had any chance to have a glimpse of the outside.

Now, if you see the film, *Shatranj ke Khilari* by Satyajit Ray, we find that in that film it is very clearly shown that when Mir goes out of the house his wife is having an affair with someone else. So, his staying back in the house is now a problem for the wife. So, it almost becomes comical in some respect and, but we also see how these 2 men are being completely useless people, they are completely disgusting people.

And, they have zero agency and Mir thinks that he has a lot of agency in terms of controlling his wife. What he does not know is his wife has got a life of her own and he would, she would much rather have him outside the house rather than inside. So, we are told that in a very comical way that you know the days of which he would be late in leaving the room, leaving the house she would remind him of leaving, but now that he is back now that he is planning on staying back and playing games of chess it becomes huge problem for him for her and now she is thinking of ways to send him away again because any chance of to have the glimpse to the outside.

So, again this is like a very it is almost like a metaphor for something else and it is metaphor for some illicit activity something that she would normally not be allowed to do, but then you know we not, it is not really spelled out in the story, but in the film it is very clearly shown that she is having an affair with a younger, young man when her

husband is away right and that obviously, becomes problem to continue when husband stays back in the in a house and plays games of chess ok.

And there was murmuring and whispering among the servants. Up until now they had sat idle, warding off flies. So, again we see this inaction over here servants had nothing to do it because there is no real home and also interestingly we do not see any children being mentioned over here. So, the unproductive quality of these men is also extended in this biological sphere. They do not really have any children. They are not really productive men, they do not really do anything productive in a in a military sphere, in the social sphere, in economics sphere, in a political sphere and also at a very biological sphere. They do not seem to have any connect physical or conjugal or anything along that lines with their wives. So, all they do is stick to each other and play games of chess, endless games of chess and that; obviously, as I mentioned becomes a proxy activity which seems to take up an erotic quality ok.

You know servants were completely idle in the house. They were never bothered by guests. But now they had to take orders the whole day. Now, to fetch paans, now sweets and the hookah kept smouldering like a lover's heart. So, again you can see the metaphors too become quite indicative, quite, they are sort of becoming more and more, they are dropping hints in terms of the relationship here. So, the hookahs are getting filled, the sweets are coming, the paans are coming, the two men are coming close to each other and spend lots of lots of time playing games of chess.

But, you know the way the hookah is described, this kept smouldering like a lovers' heart, it is almost like two lovers are coming together and everything, their paraphernalia around them, it has been created to make the right setting and so, the husbands the servants over here are quite bothered now because up until now they had a very nice job. They did not have to do much because there was hardly anyone in the house, but now that Mirza's coming over to play games of chess, Mir wants to adjust the house up in a proper way. So, he is making arrangements which entails that servants would you know be on their toes all the time to bring paan, to bring sweets or fill up the hookah to refill the hookah - the big you know tobacco the smoking pipe that people would smoke with at that point of time.

So, they would go and complain to begum sahiba. Mirza sahib's chess has become a nuisance. Running about to execute orders, our feet are blistered. What sort of a game is this that goes on from morning till evening! It would be enough to play a game for an hour or two. But we can't complain. We are his slaves and we have to obey the orders. But, this game is evil. The person playing it never prospers. A misfortune is bound to fall upon such a house.

So, you know the whole idea of the game of chess becoming a problem, a practical problem is being mentioned over and over again and it almost extends onto a sinful thing, it is almost like saying this is something sinful and a sinfulness of this game of chess becomes important for us because we find there is a value system created around this activity. And, the and the and the servants because they are inconvenienced by this activity they are now trying to put a stop to it by bringing in the sin quotient, by bringing in the value quotient, by bringing in the moral quotient.

And, we are told that the reports to the begum, so much so that we have seen whole neighbourhoods being ruined one after the other.

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ruined one after the other. Everyone in the neighbourhood is talking about it. We're his faithful servants and don't like to hear him maligned.' On this begum sahiba would say, 'I also don't like this. But he doesn't listen to anyone. What can I do?'

In the neighborhood there were a few people of the old school. They had begun to foresee many unhappy consequences. 'Nothing good will come of it. When our aristocracy is behaving in this manner, God alone can save the country. This kingdom will be ruined because of this game. It's an evil sign.'

And indeed there was great disorder in the kingdom. People were being robbed in broad daylight. There was no one who could listen to their complaints. All the wealth from the countryside was being sucked into Lucknow and blown on prostitutes, buffoons and in sensual pleasures. The blanket of debt to the English Company was becoming wetter and heavier every day. Because of the absence of good administration taxes were not being collected fully. The Resident was constantly threatening but people were so drenched in voluptuous pleasures, that not a flea tickled their ears.

Nevertheless, months passed and the game of chess went on in Mir sahib's *devan khana*. Newest strategies were being charted, newest castling moves devised. There would be arguments and accusations, but soon the two friends would be reconciled. Sometimes the game would be terminated midway, and the estranged Mirza sahib would walkout and go home, and Mir sahib would go inside. But the night's sleep would dissolve yesterday's resentment and the two friends would be back in the *devan khana*.

One day the two friends were submerged in the quicksand of chess when an officer of the king's army came riding on a horse asking for Mir sahib. Mir sahib was stunned. What was this? Why these summons? This was no good. He shut the doors and said to the servant, 'Tell him I'm not at home.'



Everyone in the neighbourhood is talking about it. We are his faithful servants and we don't like to hear him maligned.



So, again if you take a look at this the fact that everyone's talking about this man coming over every single day and how they are playing games of chess endlessly, how they, he is being maligned, his character is being maligned. So, again it seems to point to some kind of an illicit activity. It points to some kind of amorous affair that he seems to be having at a proxy level with this game of chess right.

On this the begum sahiba would say, I also don't like this. But he doesn't listen to anyone. What can I do? So, you know this conversation between the servants and the begum becomes interesting because it is reflective of the discontent and the resentment in the house and also the whole idea of decadence becomes important here. Because what has been told over and over again is the fact that this is very decadent activity and everyone is talking about how decadent this is, everyone is talking about how idle this is how this is taking away, all the tension from more productive activities. So, you know and this maligning is important thing over here because that is reflective of the character assassination around the game of chess.

In the neighbourhood there were a few people of the old school. They had begun to foresee many unhappy consequences. Nothing good will ever come of it. When our aristocracy is behaving in this manner, God alone can save the country. This kingdom will be ruined because of this game. It's an evil sign. So, if you remember the very opening of this story, we were told that if a beggar in Lucknow get some alms he will spend it in opium rather than in food. It was that kind of indulgent, intoxicated, addictive culture and that culture of intoxication is important for us to remember because even the game of chess becomes an extension of the intoxication.

Now, the elders over here they almost have a chorus like quality that like the Greek chorus who are making very choric comments on the game of chess over here and they try to talk about this in some way and say aristocracy is behaving in this way. It obviously, is very ominous as a sign it means that the kingdom is declining, the kingdom is becoming decadent and everything is coming to an end. You know is there is a ruin waiting for us at some not too distant future which will obviously be politically prophetic in quality as we see in a moment.

And indeed, and now we cut back we cut into this political decadence. We cut into how what was happening politically in Lucknow at that point of time because you know what

is important for us to understand how the micro domestic activity and the macro political activity is a, are dialogic with each other. So, even inside the home there is complete inaction, procrastination, unproductive activity, indulgence, absorption, intoxication, addiction through the game of chess and everything around there is a paraphernalia to sort of inform the addiction and that takes away time for any homely duties, that takes away time from any productive homely duties whatsoever.

And, the same thing can be seen as extended on to the bigger macro political social scene where you know the whole idea of political responsibility becomes very compromised. Everyone becomes more indulgent towards some kind of intoxicating activities and financially this is obviously, heading towards a disaster. So, as I mentioned at the very beginning of the story. This was the time where the British were beginning to get more and more involved politically. Because the East Indian Company would lend lots of money to the kingdoms and then they would also see to it by getting more and more clout into the you know investment policies and the business policies, will begin to lead the kingdom in terms of leading towards bankruptcy ok.

So, we see how this conversation this discursive conversation around the game of chess becomes connected to the political decline, decadence of the kingdom, the evil sign that has been mentioned by the elders - again very choric characters. So, we see how the servants and elders they emerge like the Greek chorus commenting on a situation of decline commenting on a situation of decadence and how that is reflective of the characters' conditions in to a certain extent.

Now, we quickly cut into the political condition now the political decadence, now suffered by Lucknow as a kingdom. So, what is happening at a political level at this point. So, this should be on the screen. And indeed, there was great disorder in the kingdom. People were being robbed in broad daylight. There was no one who could listen to their complaints. All the wealth from the countryside was being sucked into Lucknow and blown on prostitutes, buffoons and in sensual pleasures. The blanket of debt to the English company was becoming wetter and heavier every day. Because of the absence of good administration taxes were not being collected fully. The Resident was constantly threatening the, but people were so drenched in voluptuous pleasures, that not a flea tickled their ears.

So, this is like ancient decadent Rome to a certain extent where everything is burning away and the administrators are busy playing with the fiddle and different kinds of sensual instruments. So, you find that economically this is a completely bankrupt kingdom. So, all the entire economy is bumped into Lucknow from the countryside. So, people are starving on the countryside where all the money is coming in Lucknow and what is happening with the money? It is being blown away in hedonistic pleasures, it is being blown on prostitutes and blown on clowns and buffoons and entertainment.

So, the basic needs of people are being completely denied and instead what we get is a complete lack, complete sense of excess and excess consumption - unhealthy, pathologically excess consumption has been described over here. And, there is no security at hand; there is no tax collection at hand. So, taxing, security, policing army and administration everything is just coming to a decline over here. And, also we are told that the whole idea of the East Indian Company becomes important the English company obviously, had been lending money to Lucknow for a long time.

And, it was very deliberately done - the money had been lent with very high interest with the purpose of taking over Lucknow at some point of time. It was like a predatory bank system you know that is how the East Indian Company operated. It will lend money to all the kingdoms with very high interest and when the kingdoms would not be able to pay them back the money, they would just come and take over the kingdoms almost without any resistance whatsoever.

And this culture prevailed, so, till the time the sepoy rebellion happened and as you can see the British first came as traders. They started working as moneylenders, but when they got more and more clout financially in these kingdoms, they also began to get involved politically, started making political interventions, cultural interventions, policy intervention. So, everything was catered and customized to suit the British needs and that was the beginning of imperialism. It was the company rule, East Indian Company first came as a company, a multinational company started doing trade and then getting, got more involved and interfered in the political condition as well.

But, that was because the political condition here in Lucknow is completely you know going to the docks as it were it is completely bankrupt, decadent, hedonistic, irresponsible, epicurean and you know that was why the company had a bit of a you

know complete walk over into this kind of kingdom because there was no resistance whatsoever, there will be no army to resist and there will be no administration to collect taxes. So, the entire machinery of the kingdom is coming to a standstill and everyone is just consuming excessive pleasures and that consumption of excess becomes important over here for us to notice ok.

So, nevertheless, months passed on and the game of chess went on in Mir sahib's dewan khana. So, now, Mir sahib's dewan khana becomes a site of play, becomes the you know landscape where these two men would come and play endless games of chess much to the consternation and inconvenience of Mir's wife and servants. Newest strategies were being charted, newest castling moves devised. There would be arguments and accusations, but soon the two friends would be reconciled. Sometimes the game would be terminated midway, and the estranged Mirza sahib would walkout and go home, and Mir sahib would go inside. But the night's sleep would dissolve yesterday's resentment and the two friends would be back in the dewan khana.

So, this is obviously, getting very erotic in quality, the metaphors are becoming very erotic. So, it is like 2 friends who will fight and then they will kiss and make up there will be accusations and arguments, but there will also be reconciliations. So, sometimes the game will be terminated midway and the estranged Mirza sahib look at the word, 'estranged' - it is almost like a bereavement from the lover. The estranged Mirza sahib would go back home and Mir sahib would walk back into his drawing room, but they would think about this whole thing the whole night and they will come back again the next morning to resume the game of chess.

So, you know it is like a lover's activity and they have to meet every single day in order to carry out this game, these endless games of chess in a dewan khana. So, the dewan khana becomes the rendezvous, the meeting site for these friends to endlessly go on playing the game of chess.

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...and the emperor was constantly summoning the people back to his court in voluptuous pleasures, that not a flea tickled their ears.

Nevertheless, months passed and the game of chess went on in Mir sahib's *deewan khana*. Newest strategies were being charted, newest castling moves devised. There would be arguments and accusations, but soon the two friends would be reconciled. Sometimes the game would be terminated midway, and the estranged Mirza sahib would walkout and go home, and Mir sahib would go inside. But the night's sleep would dissolve yesterday's resentment and the two friends would be back in the *deewan khana*.

One day the two friends were submerged in the quicksand of chess when an officer of the king's army came riding on a horse asking for Mir sahib. Mir sahib was stunned. What was this? Why these summons? This was no good. He shut the doors and said to the servant, 'Tell him I'm not at home.'

'Where's he, if not at home?' asked the rider.

'I don't know. What's the matter?' asked the servant.

'I can't tell you. He has been summoned. May be, he has to provide some soldiers for the king's army. Jagirdari is no fun. If he has to go to the battlefield, he'll know what it is.'

'All right, your message will be delivered.'

'It's not that. I shall come again. I have been ordered to bring him along personally.'

The rider went away. Mir sahib was terrified. He said to Mirza sahib, 'Now, tell me what to do?'

'It's big trouble. Even I may be summoned.'

'He said he would come again.'

'This is a calamity. What else? If we have to go to the battlefield we would meet an untimely death.'



One day the 2 friends were submerged in the quicksand of chess. Again, the metaphor is important. This metaphor of decline or plummeting the quicksand of chess. When an officer of the king's army came riding on a horse asking for Mir sahib. Mir sahib was stunned. What was this? Why this summons? This was no good. He shut the doors and said to the servant, Tell him I'm not at home.

Now, if you look at the film you find that this was devised by Mir sahib's wife just to get rid of him from the house. So, he she would you know design this narrative of an officer coming to summon Mir sahib just so Mir sahib gets very scared and leaves the home and plays the game of chess somewhere else so she so that she can go back and resume her affair with another person. So, you find how the entire household is actually a pretty fractured household, it is not really a household, it is falling apart. There is no coordination with anyone, between any people, between any machinery, between any unit and that household becomes a microcosm of the kingdom of Lucknow to a certain extent ok.

So, this summons from some stranger officer who comes looking for Mir sahib obviously, sends you know shivers down Mir sahib's spine and he was stunned and he just becomes panicky. So, he says to the servant tell him, I am not at home. Where is he. If not at home? Asked the rider. I do not know. What's the matter? Asked the servant. I

can't tell you. He has been summoned. May be, he has to provide some soldiers for the king's army. Jagirdari is no fun. If he has to go to the battlefield, he will know what it is.

So, there is that message, this political message supposedly, this political message where Mir is supposed to give and supply soldiers to the battlefield. So, there is some army thing is happening, some war is brewing somewhere and every jagirdar, every landlord would have his or her little army which had to be supplied during a wartime and it is also told in a very sinister way, if need be he too will have to go to the battlefield. That is what the officer tells a servant to convey to Mir sahib. Now, we all know, the readers, till this point that the kind of personality, the kind of character Mir is, this would scare him to no end and he was obviously, going to run away.

All right, your message will be delivered. It's not that. I shall come again. I have been ordered to bring him along personally. The rider went away. Mir sahib was terrified. He said to Mirza sahib. Now, tell me what to do? It's big trouble. Even I may be summoned. He said he would come again. This is a calamity. What else! If we have to go to the battlefield we would meet an untimely death.

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'There's only one way out. They should not find us at home. We can spread our board somewhere on a lonely spot on the bank of Gomti. No one will know. And the fellow will return empty handed.'

'Wonderful! Nothing can be better than this.'



And here at home Mir's begun sad to the rider, 'You've given him a good rebuke.'

The rider said, 'I know how to make such fools dance to the click of my fingers. All their sense and courage has been eaten away by chess. Now they won't stay at home even by mistake.'

3

From the next day both the friends would leave their homes before dawn. With a small mat under their arms, holding a box full of paans the two friends would make their way across the river Gomti to an old deserted mosque that had been built perhaps by Asaf-ud-Daula. On their way they would buy tobacco, a chillum and wine; and they would enter the mosque, spread their mats, light their hookah and start playing. Then they would forget the world. No other words except 'check' and 'mate' would come out of their mouths. No yogi would be so focused in his meditations as these two. When in the afternoon they felt hungry they would go to an eatery and eat something; smoke their hookah for a while and then restart their play. Sometimes they would forget even to eat.

On the other side, the political situation in the kingdom was deteriorating every day. The Company's forces were advancing upon Lucknow. The city was in a great turmoil. People were fleeing to the villages with their families. But our two players were unconcerned. They came out of their houses and sneaked through narrow lanes, hiding themselves from the eyes of the king's men. They wanted to enjoy the benefits from their Jagirs yielding thousands of rupees annually by doing nothing in return.



So, again these people are very scared people, they never take any real responsibility in life. So, the whole you know the whole idea of going to battlefield and fighting a war is scaring them you know and they completely come to wit's end.

There's only one way out. They should not find us at home. We can spread our board somewhere at a lonely spot on the bank of Gomti. No one will know. And the fellow will return empty-handed. So, again they are thinking of sitting a different site and all would they would go to the Gomti river and they would play beside the river and again it is like a lovers' rendezvous. Let us go away together, I'll pack our chessboard and continue our game of chess without really bothering about these people and they should not be able to bother us either. So, let us just go away from our households.

Wonderful! Nothing can be better than this. And here at home Mir's begum said to the rider, You've given him a good rebuke. The rider said, I know how to make such fools dance on click on my fingers to the click of my fingers. All their sense and courage has been eaten away by chess. Now they won't stay at home even by mistake right. So, in the film it is slightly different as I mentioned. In the film it is shown that Mir's wife had colluded with this rider and this rider is a paid actor or something. He just comes to scare away Mir from his house, just so Mir's wife can begin or resume her amorous activities when her husband is away. When her husband stays back at home it is a problem for her as I mentioned.

So, there is a slightly comical quality about this whole situation, but the comicality obviously, is sort of underlining the decline underlying the decadence of the kingdom, the decadence of this masculinity, the decadence of political responsibility, the decadence of homely responsibility, decadence of domestic responsibilities. So, they are failing on domestic duty front, they are failing on the political duty front, they are failing on every front possible as men, as subjects, as responsible citizens. And that obviously is a reflection of the condition of Lucknow at that point you know.

And, also the in the film if you take a look at the film there is a very graphic description of Wajid Ali Shah, the Nawab of Lucknow, and how he is drowned in sensual pleasures he is always flying kites or reciting shayaris or singing songs and as seen in the film if you watch where the East Indian Company people come and talk to him about political decisions, it's a very stern meeting or a very serious political meeting.

And, in response to the summons, he starts singing, he starts humming a tune from an old shayari; obviously, reflecting the fact that he is completely disconnected from any discursive activity, disconnected from any political responsibilities right. So, Wajid Ali

Shah becomes a very prominent figure in the film and he is a very symbolic presence of the decline and decadence that you know Lucknow was experiencing politically and culturally that point of time ok.

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From the next day both the friends would leave their homes before dawn. With a small mat under their arms, holding a box full of paans the two friends would make their way across the river Gomti to an old deserted mosque that had been built perhaps by Asaf-ud-Daula. On their way they would buy tobacco, a chillum and wine; and they would enter the mosque, spread their mats, light their hookah and start playing. Then they would forget the world. No other words except 'check' and 'mate' would come out of their mouths. No yogi would be so focused in his meditations as these two. When in the afternoon they felt hungry they would go to an eatery and eat something; smoke their hookah for a while and then restart their play. Sometimes they would forget even to eat.

On the other side, the political situation in the kingdom was deteriorating every day. The Company's forces were advancing upon Lucknow. The city was in a great turmoil. People were fleeing to the villages with their families. But our two players were unconcerned. They came out of their houses and sneaked through narrow lanes, hiding themselves from the eyes of the king's men. They wanted to enjoy the benefits from their Jagirs yielding thousands of rupees annually by doing nothing in return.

One day both the friends were playing chess sitting in the decrepit mosque. Mirza's position was somewhat weak. Mir sahib was threatening him with 'check' after 'check'. In the meantime they saw the soldiers of the Company passing by. It was the gore army moving towards Lucknow to capture the city.

Mir sahib said, 'The English army is advancing. God be kind.'



From the next day both friends would leave their homes before dawn. With a small mat under their arms, holding a box-full of paans the two friends would make their way across the river Gomti to an old deserted mosque that have been built perhaps by Asaf-ud-Daula.

And, again that that movement is very important. They move away from the center to the margins and that becomes in a way a very symbolic move because you know they once occupied the position of privilege, the point of privilege and now they move away from the point of privilege to the margins, it is also reflective of the moving away of the you know decline of the feudal order. So, the feudal lords are going away; that means, sent away to the margins and something else is about to come to the centre and we all know that something else is the East Indian Company that was going to come and take over the kingdom of Lucknow in that sense.

So, this movement is also very political and also you know it connects to the erotic reading you know that one can do about these people. So, once they are chased out of the home, the two lovers pack their bags and go away and find one secluded spot to play games of chess all day.



On their way they would buy tobacco, a chillum and wine; and they would enter the mosque, spread their mats, light their hookah and start playing. So, it is a deserted, abandoned mosque at the end of the story becomes again, a very symbolic site. It is an abandoned site, an abandoned project and obviously, the center is going to be filled with a different kind of powerhouse now, a different kind of a political center now is coming into being. And, also look at the metonymic markers, they are buying wine and tobacco and spread the mats inside the mosque and indulge in this hedonistic activity of drinking and playing chess inside the mosque. So, that is obviously, reflective of the very strong decadence these people are indicating and embodying with their behavior and their activities.

Then they would forget the world. No other words except check and mate would come out of their mouths. No yogi would be so focused in his meditations as these two. When in the afternoon they felt hungry they would go to an eatery and eat something; smoke their hookah for a while and then restart their play. Sometimes they would forget even to eat.

So, the degree of absorption is so strong that they would completely forget every other duty, every other biological needs they even forget eating at some point of time right. So, they would go and smoke hookah, come back, eat something or sometimes not even eat at all they would be so addicted to the game of chess. So, the entire chess playing game over here the entire game of chess over here becomes like I mentioned before is the ludic landscape, but also as a symbolic site of absorption, a complete absorption, narcissistic absorption where it takes away all your responsibilities, it takes away all your focus and energy from any real engagement with a real world outside.

And then we connect it to the political tumult which is happening, and the political decline and decadence that is taking place over here the kingdom, as the two men are running away from the household. So, the two narrators are connected to each other as you can see.

On the other side, the political situation in the kingdom was deteriorating every day. The Company's forces were advancing upon Lucknow. So, the company would have made lots of money now, now they can buy an army, so that mercenary is working for them, Indian soldiers from different kingdoms would come and join them for better pay and in

that process you would have a big massive formidable army and now the armies are brought to march into Lucknow to take over the kingdom because the kingdom is a defaulter - they can't pay back the money that they have borrowed from the company.

The city was in great turmoil. People were fleeing the villages and the families. But our two players were unconcerned. They came out of their houses and sneaked through narrow lanes, hiding themselves from the eyes of the king's men. They wanted to enjoy the benefits from their Jagirs yielding thousands of rupees annually by doing nothing in return.

So, again this whole idea of the two men sneaking out of the house meeting somewhere clandestinely and then playing a game of chess away from the gaze of the monitors you know and the you know the prefects of the kingdom and that becomes indicative of their irresponsibility and also the amorous quality of the whole game of chess. And, also we are told about this the economic situation, where they were earning lots and lots of money thousands of rupees annually back in those days it must have meant you know a significant sum without doing anything in return, without paying back anything in return politically or culturally or existentially or militarily or financially from the matter nothing in return has been delivered by them.

One day both the friends were playing chess sitting in the decrepit mosque. Mirza's position was somewhat weak. Mir sahib was threatening him with check after check. In the meantime, they saw the soldiers of the Company passing by. It was the gora army moving towards Lucknow to capture the city.

So, I stop at this point today, but it is a very political and graphic scene and if you see the film we find that there is a boy who appears at the end of the film where the boy is there you know beside the abandoned mosque and he is the one who brings the kebabs, and tobacco and wine for these people. And, as he goes to bring the stuff and as he is coming back to the players, the army is marching in and the boy just stands there completely bedazzled and you know very fascinated by the red army walking in.

Now, that becomes a very symbolic scene, I am just digressing a bit, but then I think this is a point that can be connected to this story as well because the film is obviously, an adaptation of the story. Now, in that film we find that the boy is absorbing that order of masculinity, he is absorbing that culture of masculinity, that military utilitarian pragmatic

productive culture of masculinity and is moving away from the feudal decadent hedonistic masculinity that he had been serving so far for generations.

Now, because he is a boy, he is at a cusp of manhood so, he is absorbing that kind of thing, his consumption of that masculinity becomes a very political statement at that point of time as depicted in the film. That the new order of masculinity, the new generation of men will imbibe and consume that new order of masculinity which is mercantile in quality, which is capitalist quality, which is pragmatic and utilitarian in quality rather than the hedonistic and self-absorbing narcissistic indulgent masculinity which these two men have been embodying.

Because even when the soldiers are coming in, even when the army is coming to take over the kingdom these two men could not be bothered to steal away from the chessboard and do something about it. They are still running away from responsibilities and endlessly playing games of chess, they are completely absorbed in this game. And, so, this game also becomes a proxy battleground which takes away the tension from the real battleground outside the real battle is happening.

So, all the energy is directed towards this little proxy battleground as a result of which the company's army faces no resistance whatsoever. They just march in and take over the kingdom as if this was just a piece of cake - a very low hanging fruit. So, this lack of resistance is also part of the you know exhaustion of energy that these two men exhibit, and obviously, these two men are symptomatic of this kingdom. They reflect the culture of the kingdom where the real crisis happens somewhere, the entire attention goes away from that place and redirects itself to a very proxy activity what is the game of chess over here.

And, they are more concerned protecting the pawns and the kings and queens over the chessboard rather than a real king and queen in a political scene. So, again this becomes a micro absorption and the focus on the game of chess takes away the focus from the real political scene which is what we see towards the end of this short story. So, we will finish the story in another lecture and then we have a winding up lecture with which we will finish this course.

Thank you for your attention.