

Tamarind History Part-3
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Length: 51:55

Hello and welcome to this discussion on the novel *The Tamarind History* by Sundara Ramaswamy. I want to begin this discussion by bringing your attention to one of the commentaries on this novel and this is the blurb on Penguin's Modern Classics.

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Life of an aged Tamarind Tree

With a narrative breadth never before seen in Tamil fiction, Sundara Ramaswamy's *Tamarind History* inaugurated a new era in Tamil letters. Its meditations on the loss of beloved places, the shared experience of the past and the meaning of togetherness amid struggle, ambition and enmity, all flow from the life of an aged tamarind tree that stands at the centre of a bustling town. This town's wild places - their mythic pasts still treasured by an old wanderer and the youth who listen to his tales - are stripped away as politicians commit to modernization in the name of progress. Yet the town remains filled with life and beauty even as it is irrevocably damaged.

<https://www.abebooks.co.uk/Tamarind-History-Sundara-Ramaswamy-Blake-Wentworth/11681464667/bd>



If you turn to the back cover, you will find these ideas. 'With a narrative breadth never before seen in Tamil fiction, Sundara Ramaswamy's *Tamarind History* inaugurated a new era in Tamil letters. Its meditations on the loss of beloved places, the shared experience of the past and the meaning of togetherness amid struggle, ambition and enmity, all flow from the life of an aged tamarind tree that stands at the centre of a bustling town. This town's wild places- their mythic pasts still treasured by an old wanderer and the youth who listen to his tales are stripped away as politicians commit to modernization in the name of progress. Yet the town remains filled with life and beauty even as it is irrevocably damaged.'

So, if you think about this commentary it is a beautiful commentary on life and loss. You can challenge some of the opinions, which are part of this take on the novel. If you go to the last line, yet the town remains filled with beauty and life even as it is irrevocably damaged. That is open for debate. What continues to be beautiful in this town is a subject that needs to be probed and noted. It is difficult to find the beauty of this small town, once the modernization sets in. And some would argue even prior to that, even prior to that, the aesthetics, the aesthetics, which

frame life in that small town, is a problematic aesthetic to some. So, you need to understand what is aesthetics. what is truly beautiful you need to have an understanding of that and apply it and try to read this particular small town life from your understanding of aesthetics. And once again there is no one standard theory on aesthetic, which you may find appealing. What is beauty is open to interpretation. So, it is a complex nature of beauty. If there is beauty in this small town that we get narrated through the eyes of figures like Damodra Aasan, the narrator and Joseph and other characters that we see milling around in this town.

I want to go back to this idea of meditations. It's meditation on the loss of beloved places. That's definitely there. If you go to chapter 3, you find the tamarind tree being threatened by a Koplani. It is quote unquote 'a beautiful place' for figures such as Damodra Aasan and his youthful followers and that beloved place is threatened and again, in chapter four, you find the casuarina grove which is destroyed in order to set in motion the narrative of progress.


So, there are meditations on the beauty of such wild places. And if you read the chapter pretty closely, you will see how the aesthetic of the wild is established and then you move on to the destruction. So, there is the past or the glorified past and the, you know, the modern present in the same chapter and the narrator asks you to kind of judge between these two extremes. I call it extremes for certain reasons, which I will share with you shortly.

Wild places and they are indeed wild places. The tamarind tree with its beautiful tank, the dark exotic place where there is a tryst between a young woman and a stranger. That's a wild place and even the casuarina grove is a wild place where, you know, the adolescents gathered together to experiment with all sorts of things. So it is a wild place, which gets 'civilised' quote unquote by democratic progress. So, we will unpack the chapter four shortly but I want you to kind of read against the grain or test certain concepts for yourselves. For instance, this blurb calls Damodra Aasan as 'an old wanderer'. It is an exotic term, isn't it? Old wanderer, it takes us back to those narratives from the west and the east, you know, figures such as Odysseus, Aeneas and all these mythic characters who wander and who meet with numerous adventures and along the way they come to know more about life and the right life and righteous living and things like that.

So, the blurb is trying to fit Damodra Aasan in that kind of tradition of mythic heroes the wanderer figure. And he is a wanderer because he comes and goes from that small town. He disappears one fine day and nobody was able to locate where exactly he's gone and we don't even know whether he is alive or dead and what kind of death did he meet with? So, these are

like a set of narratives of indeterminacy that we are shown through this character of Aasan and I want you to kind of gather the details, which contribute to such kind of characterization. So, this is a way of life that we are shown from certain perspectives, isn't it? Certain perspectives and be very certain about who is narrating, who is capturing, who is describing and whether that is the representative view of that particular town life in that era.


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Life Writing

"Our working definition of autobiographical or life narrative, rather than specifying its rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory."

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. "Life Writing in the Long Run: A Smith & Watson Autobiography Studies Reader." Michigan Publishing, 1 Jan. 2007, <http://dx.doi.org/10.3998/mpub.9739969>.



When we read this novel, we, if we want to kind of think about the genre of this novel, we can call it as life writing, you know the life writing of a particular youth in that point of time in that particular region of India. So, this is one version of life writing. So, how do we see life writing? How do we define life writing?

So, I have an excerpt for you from a couple of critics there. So, 'Our working definition of autobiographical or life narrative, rather than specifying its rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such text, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places they are the same time and dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory.' It's an interesting definition of life writing. So, we have a narrator who is selectively engaging with life, this is unlike the meaning associated with the third person narrator in a 19th century novel maybe, where we have an omniscient narrator who knows, and who knows about everything that is going on in that universe. But in life writing we understand that the narratives that are offered to us are selective, specifically-chosen keeping in tune with the attitudes and the philosophy of the particular narrator. So, it's a personal story-telling, even though we are given to understand that this tamarind history is trying to represent in its entirety

the way of life of a particular place in Tamil Nadu at a particular time we understand that this is a selective representation of that period at that point of time. So, this is not a universal rendering of all that has gone on in that place at that point. It is selective and the narrator selectively engages with their lived experience to personal story telling. So, if you remember the previous section one of the students was telling us that we realised that this is Damodra Aasan's version of things not others's versions of how things have gone about a particular event. There could be other narratives which are marginalised to highlight Assans take on things, there could be dorsal there could be other peoples. So we do understand that these kind of selective representations are, you know, sourced from personal processes and are types of memory. You have a personal history encoded in your mind. There is a personal history, there is a personal archive made up of your own selective choice of memory about a particular place and time.

So, when we read certain texts we need to keep this idea in mind that this is perhaps not the homogenising grand narrative of history. There are multiple alternative histories which are out there, we need to go to those, certain narratives, other narratives to kind of piece together a bigger picture. Not the best picture, but a bigger picture. So, we need to be conscious of that, otherwise we will get a very skewed representation of history and life.

The other major concept that's a big subtext to this novel is the idea of urbanization. It's one of the major themes of this novel. The impact of modernity, the impact of modernization, the impact of democracy itself. So, picking up from what we read in the previous class, we saw narratives of folklore, we saw narratives of legends, which are pre-historical and then we saw narratives of kings and Maharajas and then we have met with references to colonial regimes and now we are told about municipality and other democratic units.

So, you can trace a trajectory where we can see a nation from its infancy growing to its adolescence and maturity and moving on too moving on to adulthood, metaphorically speaking in terms of state structures. So this is a political process, which is rendered in a narrative in literary terms. It is rendered in narrative and literary terms. And when we come to the period of modernity, modernization seems to be the biggest problem. It seems to be the catalyst which is problematizing, complicating life for people and the landscape itself.

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Urbanization

the urbanization is today being actualized, albeit unevenly, on a worldwide scale, as well as in specific territories, regions and places; and they explore some of the wide-ranging intellectual, social, political and environmental implications ... this newly consolidated, planetary formation of urbanization has blurred, even exploded, long-entrenched socio-spatial borders—not only between city and countryside, urban and rural, core and periphery, metropole and colony, society and nature, but also between the urban, regional, national and global scales themselves—thereby creating new formations of a thickly urbanized landscape whose contours are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to theorize, much less to map (19).

Neil Brenner, *Implosions/explosions: Towards a study of planetary urbanization* (2014)



So, let's see what theory of urbanization is, from today's point of view and then we can go back to Tamarind history. This is Neil Brenner's idea. These are Brenner's ideas. 'The urbanization is today being actualized, albeit unevenly, on a worldwide scale, as well as in specific territories, regions and places and they explore some of the wide-ranging intellectual, social, political and environmental implications. This newly consolidated, planetary formation of urbanization has blurred, even exploded, long-entrenched socio-spatial borders not only between city and countryside, urban and rural, core and periphery, metropole and colony, society and nature, but also the urban, regional, national, and global scales themselves thereby creating new formations of a thickly urbanised landscape whose contours are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to theorize, much less to map.'

This is a phenomenon, which is inevitable. It is inevitably happening on a worldwide scale. Its tentacles are everywhere and not unique to a particular region and it is complicating the relations between various entities, which are listed there in the slide for you.

I want to pick on society and nature as it is especially relevant to Tamarind history. Nature and society come to a head in this process of urbanization, especially in the chapter of casuarina grove, chapter 4, where we see, you know, through the eyes of the narrator, how wild and beautiful, and free this place is, accessible to a wide section of that society. And how suddenly once it has undergone some transformation, it becomes a restricted space, with different rules coming into play to make sure that that space becomes accessible to several participants. So, in this kind of modernization, the relationship between all these entities becomes complex and no longer the way it used to be. What Ramaswamy has tried to do is capture the small life-

narratives of different sections of that populous, and at the same time, bring out the contrast between this big entity of the past and the modern present.

There are complications as well in this attempt to chalk out a neat binary. Let me go back to that description that Karnalius picked out for us on page 53. That list of things the youth engaged in, is interesting to read to put it mildly. 'For 50 years or so he said,' *he said*, it's again, we need to realise Aasan's versions of things- 'For 50 years or so, he said, local boys, who had a streak of wildness to them, would go to the grove and there, they would take their first lesson in the art of sating the restlessness of youth.' And the restlessness is listed out for you. 'Taking nature's command is a basic fact of life, they must have been amazed. These simple creatures by humanity's shifts in mood, its inconsistencies, its millions and millions of desires of each and every kind.'

A very quick interpretation would be that this was how life was led in the wild nature, in the past on the part of the boys who were quote unquote 'wild'. So, that's one way of looking at it. Another way of looking at it is that this grove offered a space to lead life at its very basic. So, this is life at its very very simple level where desires- physical desires of drinking intoxicating liquids and indulging in the release of personal desires- these seem to be these seem to be the key trope associated with that particular wild space. Now, contrast this space with that park, which was established after demolishing or destroying or decimating the casuarina grove. We have a wide array of the population enjoying that space. So, what I'm trying to do is argue against this rhetoric that modernity is bad, tradition is good. I am doing it for argument's sake. This is also one other way of looking at things. So, in the absence of the casuarina grove, look at the number of different people, people from different walks of life, enjoying that social space. It is a civilised social space of pleasure. We have lovers, we have the newlyweds, we have the pensioners, we have the professors, we have the students. Here is life's, life's, you know, plenty.

So, we need to recognise the positives, which have also emerged from this kind of active destruction. So, that is something we need to note and I agree with all the other points that has been mentioned by Karnalius and there is a slant. There is an inevitable slant on the part of the narrator, on the part of Damodra Aasan, on the part of the Nadar, in the sense that they believed that is this modernity, this progress is not for the good. And the narrator wants us to kind of sympathize with that rhetoric. We understand that and reasonably so, there are valid points which make us realise that this kind of destruction is unacceptable. The elimination of beauties

of nature are unacceptable but we also need to kind of look at modernity in a more nuanced manner in the kind of accessibility it offers to a whole lot of other populations.

And let's just look at certain details. I love to do a little bit of close reading as well to get a sense of the narrator's slant. Page 55, 'The tamarind tank was long gone and the bazaar and the bus stand at the south had already been built, the milling crowds and the loud roar of traffic trying to drown each other out. For most people, seeing the cashew nut trees right next to the, to all these proud displays of modernity, must have looked as inappropriate as seeing a fashionable young woman going off to college with her grandmother's jewels in her hair. It was a time, you could say, when people got caught up in the idea of good taste and looked forward to the day when the trees would be gone.'

So, he is telling us that the Casuarina grove itself has become an eyesore, an oddity, an awkward vestige from the past. Nature becomes a vestige of the past. It is like your grandmother's jewels that a fashionable young woman wears when she is going to college. It needs to be thrown out. It is not appropriate. So, that is the kind of- that is the kind of perspective that these ignorant modernisers had in terms of viewing the presence of the casuarina grove. But I want us to think deeply about the metaphor, the analogy, the figurative parallel, the figurative parallel. The parallel to a fashionable young woman going off to college with her grandmother's jewels. And I was wondering about the appropriateness of the equivalence. Could we kind of reasonably compare casuarina grove to grandmother's jewels in this kind of sense? So, I leave that to your analysis. So, think about that analogy, whether it works- whether it works, whether it is suitable. What further slants do you get from the narrator's point of view about a fashionable young woman going off to college with these kinds of paraphernalia? So, think about it.

And we can clearly see that the landscape engineer from Tanjavur is mocked, is satirised and quite rightly so, in the way he manages the park and the pond and the artificial zooms. So, there is a lot of satire going on there. 'Exotic varieties were even imported from overseas. There could be no room for ordinary plants like roses or different kinds of jasmine. Flowers like that must have been subjected to a total boycott.' So, jasmine, indigenous, regional, flowering, plant all these are boycotted in order to make space for exotic, imported, vegetation- flowering vegetation.

There is a lot of film criticism going on to interest in the narrative of a film star who is unwell. And look at the, look at the topics for conversations among college going youth, you know. The emphasis, the different emphasis that they have about what interests them, what concerns

them most. That tells you the kind of life that these youth led and they were worried that the professor would spout some kind of, you know, poems from Tamil and they are relieved that he did not do so. So, it is a very humorous portrait of society too and it kind of mocks the concerns of the young people of those days too.

There is a big chunk of narrative on the idea of righteousness. Hypocrisy, you know, fake demeanours and so on and there is also a description on when to defy divine commandments and the right principles. You know, there are certain moments where you can, you know, reasonably defy all these good principles and there is a section on that on page 68. I come to page 69 and this is to do with that park where there are equipments on which children play. The swings, the teeter-totters, and the slide and so on. So, Karnalius very usefully gave us that contrast to the past, where the wild boys just enjoyed that space, used the tree branches as swings and how the trees used to entertain these boys and now, things have changed with modern, lifeless equipment offering sources of enjoyment. So, the risk, the neat contrast, the inevitable contrast. And there is also the problematic of all these slum kids occupying a lot of those equipment and these kids being chased away by the caretaker. And again, there is protest from that side. Protest from the parents of these kids, the underprivileged kids. And they have to work out a scheme in which there is an equitable share of enjoyment for every kid in the neighbourhood.

So, what do they do? They come up with these ideas of queues. So, there are queues before slides, queues before all these teeter-totters. There are queues before, you know, all kinds of equipment and the boys get tired of waiting in a queue and they switch between queues, hoping that you know, that would be the shorter queue and they want to go, get at first to enjoy that particular equipment.

So, there are problems, practical problems in this kind of scheme, which is made to ensure that everybody gets their share, fair share of pleasure of some this common space. This common, social, civic space. So, we get that satire as well. How it is difficult in this democratic society to organize an equitable share of enjoyments for all sections of the community.

Let me come to page 70. So, this dance, he says I am reading excerpts, 'This dance of switching from queue to queue.' He calls that a dance. 'This dance is a game in itself and the children jump back and forth in line as if they have come to the playground for that purpose alone.' You know, their enjoyment of the slide or other equipment becomes secondary to the idea of jumping queues, the idea of being in a queue, which is moving faster. That in itself becomes a

game. A source of enjoyment for the kids. 'When dusk starts to fall, the children towards the end of the line finally give up and start to head back home. They trudge along discouraged, telling themselves that they are not coming back any more to play at the playground.' Look at the disillusionment, because there is so much delay for the kids. 'They are back the next day' because they are resilient being kids. 'They are back the next day. Yesterday's low spirits was no match for the current eagerness to play. They come running as fast as they can trying to be first in any way possible. Stuck in the back of the line, they wait. Tears dwell up in their eyes as the children dwell on their helpless plight.' Again, there is disillusion, it is a kind of swing between emotions. 'David, the attendant, starts to walk away to go to the bathroom or smoke a cigarette and they unite, cursing him to pieces. It is nobody's fault but his, they tell themselves the things have gone so wrong. The times are changing fast, so clearly those days. The world seems like it was spinning at breakneck speed when the park replaced casuarina grove. It seems like a dream when I think back on it now and also feels so real.'

So, there is a kind of tragedy underlying this project of modernity, which we understand from reading this episode alone. You don't have to go far- this episode in itself with the kids as the central participants. We are told by the narrator how much of a failure plot, this plot of modernization in itself is.

So, there is the farcical, there is the tragical, there is this element of hope and optimism associated with this project of progress but there is also tears and disillusionment and loss of hope. My question is yes, we understand that but, as very smart readers, our question should be is this the right example to offer? Is this the right example to offer the project of democracy? Is this the right example to offer about the project of modernization? There should be a kind of balance, if this is a representative portrait, there should be a balance of rendering of narratives of progress. It cannot be a very crude distinction between the past as good, the present as extremely bad. So, we need to understand that dynamic too in the representation of different trajectories of progress.

So, chapter 5 is an interesting chapter. I would call it the chapter, which sows the seeds of dissention, real dissention in terms of the individual plot of this particular novel. We have this large-scale narrative about society, large-scale narrative about history, progress. But we also have a private narrative going on involving certain characters. In that plot of individuals, this particular chapter is especially significant because it becomes the catalyst. It has elements,

which kind of sets the ball rolling at breakneck speed, which kind of pushes the narrative to its teleology. So, this chapter is significant for its narrative function.

There is a reference to the bishop's house, the bishop's palace. His mansion is called a palace and he is a charitable man. He offers milk, free of cost to the underprivileged kids in the neighbourhood. That narrative is there and you can see the boys and the girls- children walking to his house everyday on a particular day of the week to get the supply of the milk and it is on a Thursday to be precise. And one fine Thursday, or one rainy Thursday, on their way, they come to this tamarind tree, which is full of pods, tamarind pods and alongside this bunch of kids, we have a bunch of scavengers as well. The scavenger men and women who congregate at this space near the tamarind tree where they are allotted jobs by the supervisors to go, clean up, you know, particular part of the neighbourhood and one of the women, very attractive woman, newly-married woman, wants to eat a tamarind pod and she asks her husband to, you know, get a pod down by throwing a stone at it and he does.

And this kind of act makes everybody imitate that, and the boys and everybody starts to throw stones at the tamarind tree and the pods fall. They pick up the pods. They collect the pods and just, you know, scoot from that area. They just escape from that area. So, the entire harvest from the tamarind tree is gone. And who sets the ball rolling? It is a particular scavenger woman.

Let us come to that section, page 73. 'There is a water pump at that junction located right next to the wall around the community park. A scavenging woman was sitting there indifferent to the damp ground around the pump. Given her age and youthful body, the fact that she was wearing a blouse and her sari was certainly not due to principle. A few children approach instant close by shifting the gaze between her and the man taking attendance. Her gaze was totally focused on the tamarind tree. "So, many pods on that one tree," the scavenging women said. "Yeah are just hanging there." A little boy next to her said. He stood looking up at the tamarind tree. Rain drops splatted down. A tamarind pod fell right in front of the scavenging woman.

The boy standing next to her saw it and immediately bent down and snatched it up. "Give me half my dear, my little prince." After wavering for a moment, the boy pinched off a piece and gave it to her." And then she meets with another scavenger woman and there is a conversation between the two. ' "So, did you get sick this morning?" "Oh my God, I threw up so badly. My stomach was all knotted up when I woke up this morning and there it went," she said, dragging

the fruit hard against her tongue. The younger women studied the way she was souring the tamarind's taste with keen interest. "Is it really sour?" "Oh God, yes. It is sour, really sour. It hits you in the brain." And then the young woman turned away and walked into the group of men in the middle of the crowd to a young, well-built scavenger wearing a Khaki shirt. She came up to him and tapped him on the shoulder, whispering something to him while pointing at the tree. He left the crowd and walked over, she followed behind him. The young scavenger looked in either direction then checked once more to be sure. Next to the pump lay a pile of rubble meant for repairing the road. He picked up a pebble from it, took aim with his left forefinger and let it fly. A dozen or so pods showered down. The other women went over to their husbands and whispered to them sweetly. Many more scavengers approached and threw rocks at the tree. The children who had hesitated before, they were worried that scavengers would start a fight if they threw rocks at the tree now. Threw them with abandon.

The skinny ones and the scavenger women gathered the pods. Then a group of kids coming from Vadivesharam arrived at the tamarind tree junction and they and the scavengers who had previously been standing off to the side, all started to throw rocks as well. The tamarind pods came showering down. Everyone gathered as many as they could.

The children filled their milk pails with tamarind. "Police!" one mischievous rascal shouted when nobody was expecting and the boys immediately took off yelling 'Mahatma Gandhi Ki Jai!' They ran a quarter of a mile before they realised it was a false alarm.'

This is like an up-ending of the narrative of Eve in the Garden of Eden. It kind of has, a kind of archetypal echo of that narrative of these subversive women. The problematic, you know, gender which is sowing the seeds of discord and from now on, there is a spiralling there is a downward spiral of things in this world. So, you can see how, you know, the world-making of this novel comes to a close and from this point on we get narratives, histories of individual figures, tradesmen especially and everything is somehow connected to this particular significant act of theft.

We need to think about the description of the scavenger women too. They are all very attractive. All very attractive. And even back in chapter four, go back to the description of women. You can see that it's their sexuality that gets enhanced, highlighted, through the narrator's description. So, we need to think about it, in a larger way, in a broader way. What is the function of such description in relation to female identity? What purpose? What function does this kind

of representation serve in terms of the larger purpose of the novel? You need to think about that.

And again the other question that I want to find answers to is this-what is the significance of this slogan when somebody says police, the boys cried Gandhi ji Ki Jai and they run away. What is the significance? The implication is that they still have that colonial hangover. The colonial hangover that the police are the colonial police and the boys running away are somehow linked to the indigenous protestors the freedom fighters.

Of course, that is just the analogy. That is just the cultural parallel. But things are so different; things are so different in terms of state of affairs. The boys who were thieving, the scavengers who are thieving and then the authorities, or the authorities established by the democratic nation. So, but we have all these hangovers, vestiges from the past, still engraved deep in the mind of the populous. So, who is responsible for the theft of the tamarind pods? That is the question to which you know the answer. The scavengers, especially the scavenger women. Now, chapter 6.

Student: So, in chapter six, we find something pretty interesting because if we trace it back with chapter 5, there is a certain link which I personally after reading both the chapters, is interested to look at. It is like, specifically in the chapter 6, we look at a tradition of auction which is actually I mean, taken care of by the municipality because the tamarind tree at the cross road, located at the cross roads is a property of the municipality from which the municipality derives revenue and income in terms of selling the pods to the merchants and the businessmen in and around the locality.

In this chapter, we look at certain individuals who are actually, they are primary to make the auction successful and it looks at the business class or the upper class of the people who are actually there to buy the tamarind pods in order to help the municipality to work for the sake of the locality and the society. And, throughout the story we find that there is this character Mootha Pillai and Abdul Ali sahib who are the two most passionate competitors in the course of the auction. And the people around, the common folk, they are pretty much fascinated and they are always very interested to look forward to them. The act of the auction is something more of a tradition than only a business transaction because it goes on for around 25 years. Except one unpredictable situation which happens on the 26 th year when on the day of the auction, surprisingly the pods from the trees get disappeared. And the person who is responsible

for taking over the auction is Vallinayagam Pillai, he goes to the police station in order to file a report about it, assuming it to be an act of theft.

Now, this is where I feel it is very interesting with chapter 5 because in chapter 6, only upper-class people or the business-class people are the ones who are entitled to buy the tamarind pods ; and they are the most valid question which reverberates throughout the chapter 6 is that who is responsible for the theft? If we go back to chapter 5, we will see the common folk, the scavengers and the children who are there, who have actually taken the opportunity of breaking down the tamarind pods by throwing stones. It is kind of an assumption on my part but somewhere or the other, I feel that these two chapters, they are linked somewhere where the common people, who are actually scavengers, who are the unprivileged class people, they get their opportunity to have their taste for the tamarind pods while on the since the last 25 years, through this act of auction, these tamarind pods or the right to tamarind pods actually validated to the upper class. So, I feel that in that sense, chapter 5 and chapter 6 can be read as kind of a pair-piece and that is how chapter 6 ends where one of the very interesting facts about chapter 6 at the end which I should mention here is that Mootha Pillai actually comments on something that is very very ironic comment according to the social sensibility. He anticipates the modern society there. I will be quoting that. It is like, this is exactly it is in page 89, it is in the middle, so ‘Look, this is exactly how the country is going to be run from now on. They are going to pick us clean, cradle to grave, as far as I know, the auction has gone on since 1928. For the past 25 years, two and a quarter panams. Let us see, yes nine chakkrams and the whole thing was mine. This is the very first year the auction has fallen through. Henceforth, it will be the same story. You go walking and someone rips the veshti right off your waist. Ask why and he will tell you that it was his second veshti and anyway he saw you wearing a loincloth. Ten people can see it happen and they will all support him.’

So, this a pretty ironic comment about anticipating how modern society is going to be. Perhaps he is a little insecure that the common people are actually trying to grab what he usually is entitled to. So in this chapter also, the writer brings a little bit of struggle between the upper class and the lower class about rights and who is entitled to what. So, in that sense, he actually said some more problematic and much more socially sensible narrative, which is, going to I think, roll into the narrative further in course of the novel.

Professor: Sanchar has hit the high notes of this chapter and kind of touched on the conceptual battles between two entities. The haves and the have-nots. So, I will just go back to certain

areas to kind of accentuate that, reiterate that. It is on page 77, 'Every goatherd in town depended on the municipality's banyan tree to feed his animals. It was an attractive side to raising goats, using the municipality's banyan leaves to feed them and keeping the milk. It was also very profitable.'

It is an interesting way of looking at things. You can get a sense of the slant of the narrator, when you kind of look at the way he analyses the benefits that these goatherds derive through the way they exploit the municipality's goods. I just want to bring your attention to that episode. The way he interprets. Think about it. So, there is a detailed narrative of how this auction is done. So, it's very interesting from a cultural point of view. So, we can go and read that detail by detail. It tells you how life was led in terms of all these kind of trading rites of passage. So, it is a cultural curiosity. You can go and read those.

And look at the way crowds lionise the big tradespeople such as Mootha Pillai. They say he is a God, he is a monster. Look at his tactics, the strategies that he employs to get the proceeds of the tamarind tree. So, you can see the response of the crowd as well, it becomes a spectacle. A spectacle, which brings the community together for the benefit of these big businessmen, these farm holders such as Mootha Pillai and Abdul Sahib.

Okay, page 86, let us go to 85, Vallinayagam Pillai doesn't know that the pods are gone. They have been stolen. He is on the way to the space of the auction and there are a couple of people who are sniggering at him and he goes to have a conversation. 'Aiyappan turned away towards the store and howled with laughter and he says, 'I'm going to the auction.' 'Oh the auction! What's it going to bring this year?' '45 rupees by my estimate.' 'Really, it will go up that much?' 'It was a very good yield this year.' Coolie Aiyappan nearly doubled over at this point. Quickly slipped behind the shop. A howl of laughter pierced the air. 'Hey, you stupid scavenger. What is the big joke? Someone dancing without their clothes on?' Vallinayagam backed at him angrily. Coolie Aiyappam ran towards the entrance to the municipal park. His hand clamped firmly over his mouth.'

He is still trying to control his laughter. 'Vallinayagam Pillai's face darkened with rage. He is furious. "Now sir, there is no need to get angry," said Damu, the storekeeper. "No, I have been watching him for a while now. Always the same stupid grin on that boy. One look at that idiot I feel like slapping him. He is going to find himself under my thumb. One of these days, I will show him. Go ahead, laugh if you want." '.

So, you can see, the anger on the part of this municipal employee towards that coolie Aiyappan. And you can see how this narrative of progress has strengthened him to laugh, to snigger at figures of authority, mock figures of authority such as Vallinayagam Pillai. And he cannot understand, he cannot tolerate that kind of reaction on the part of a coolie and he says one of these days, I will show him, I will bring him under my thumb.

So, there is a power struggle between these two groups and that becomes manifest through such interactions. And from now on, you will see how this struggle erupts between these two classes. That is how the novel is going to proceed from this point on. And I am very happy that Sanchar brought out the perspective that for the first time 25 years down the line, we have these underprivileged classes or scavengers who have been cleaning up this place, taking a moment to kind of, you know, enjoy the proceeds of the tamarind tree. For all these years, it has gone to all these big business people and for the first time, these scavengers get to enjoy these lush products of that tamarind tree. So, that perspective is neatly mentioned by Sanchar.

Page 88. And then there is a discussion about, there is a discussion about how and why things have gone wrong and a simple answer is there are too many masters these days. Page 88, 'Before this, there was only one man ruling our kingdom. Now look, there are ten men running things. Too many centres of authority. Is that what you mean? Is that what I mean? One kingdom, one man should speak, others listen. It is insane. All these fooling around. Take my house. If I talk, my wife talks, my children talk, my driver talks, my maid talks and my servant talks. Who is doing the listening?'

You see what I am saying to you. There shouldn't be a dispersal of spaces of authority. It should be concentrated on a limited number of figures, say one. That is better, according to the speaker here. So, you can see how they are trying to make sense of how and why things have gone wrong in this country.

And the same excerpt that Sanchar pointed out, Mootha Pillai's argument. His rationalising, his attempt to come and make sense of things that have gone wrong, it is pretty interesting. It is very very interesting, the way he understands. He has a lot of resentment, you know, he has a lot of resentment within his heart. And he says, we are going to be ripped off, totally ripped off by these fellows. They are going to, you know, remove the veshtis that we're wearing and they are going to kind of take away all our properties and that is the way it is going to be because this is our new country. This is a democratic country. This is a country which is

progressing and our power, our properties are going to be thieved, are going to be robbed by these people.

So, that is the resentment which is making him talk all these ideas that is why he says, you go walking, 'someone rips the veshti right off your waist and ten people can see it happen and they all support him. The common mass is on the side of all these people who are robbing us.' So, you can see how that pyramid with, the hierarchical pyramid is getting destroyed is in the progress of being damaged by all these different classes, which are underprivileged, and there are other examples from the same chapter to point out the struggle between the classes. Because things have changed, structures of power have changed. There is a democratisation of space, and you can see that in the chapter where the children get access to the park as well. How the slum children do come back into the picture. How the parents' protest brings them back and gets them to enjoy, and that pleasure is not the privilege of only the upper elite. So I will stop here.