

Tamarind History Part 6
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If you look at Chapter 11, we are retold the story of Damu's exploits once again. And you might want to think about the significance of the repetition of retelling of the same event. Why are we told this numerous times? What is the significance of this reiteration? So Damu's exploits in the freedom struggle is retold and even within chapter 11 you can see multiple narratives which comment on, which tried to recapture how the events unfolded.

So, if you look at page 152 the paragraph which begins as 'The crowd that gathered around the clock tower junction saw what happened next.' That paragraph alone has several strands some conflicting the thread, the story thread that has gone before. So, what is the point of such retellings? And Sourav was pointing about the issue of gossip. So what is gossip? What is exaggeration, what is reality gets muddled up in these multiple narratives. And that also reminds me of the chatter of the young college going lads who talk about a sick film star whether she recovered or not. So, you can see how different trajectories confuse the plot of a particular event. So, we need to keep that in our mind. So I am just going to read a point here and there. 'Some people say they saw him pick it back up so that he could wrap it round his head as he crawled slowly down the paved road coughing up blood, but that truly is not exaggeration.' So, some people say this but that is an exaggeration but that is not the truth. And this is what the narrator says. And I want to go back to that previous point, (page) 152, 'When the police superintendent tells you to remove your turban, it takes a different sort of man to refuse to take it off and fold it under his arm. It is not as though the deputy told him to cut his own throat.' How do you understand this? It takes a different sort of man to refuse that order- it takes perhaps a very courageous man to refuse that order. And then what about that last remark thrown in by the narrator? 'It is not as though the deputy told him to cut his own throat.' So, I want you to think about that statement and try to understand the point of view that the narrator is trying to make. And we need to realize that Damu is this one big shining example for the freedom fighter. We have the press being represented by this complicated Machiavilleian Isaki.

We have the municipal president represented by Joseph. We have trades people. We have a trade unionist on the part of Janardhanam. So, we have figures representing different institutions in this particular novel and you want to think about how good are they representing that institution. And again I also wanted to think about how good they are the institution of marriage is represented as well.

You can see the slant of the narrator coming in on page 155- 'Friends cheered him on, convinced that his speech that they had taken everyone by storm,' Damu's speech, '...he had gone a little bit over the top but it had been so long since he had thundered away like that. There was no real need for instance, to have touched on the scavengers' grievances, nevertheless he declared that if the municipality continued to unrecognize the scavengers...' and so on and so forth. The emphasis here is there was no real need for instance, to have touched on the scavengers' grievances. So, you can see the narrator trying to intervene with his commentary on the state of affairs picked up by Damu. So, we do get his slant in the narrative.

Page 156, 'But when he was suddenly arrested one day, people treated him like a hero for exposing the black market. His celebrity grew, and his friends whispered criticism ground to the halt.' He is doing this exposure because of personal reasons because of personal rivalry. But the people kind of exaggerate his interventions and treat him as a hero who has done something for the society. So he has kind of his image associated with the previous image of freedom fighting. So, you can see what kind of role exaggeration plays in creating the celebrity cult. One moment somebody is celebrated the next moment that celebration is destroyed.

Chapter 12. Isaki is the hero of this chapter, or the antihero. He is very clever, he is cagey, he is manipulative, and the sole purpose of Isaki's visit to Abdul Khader is to make sure that Abdul Khader participates in the election for the 13th ward so that Damu will lose. And Isaki is doing this perhaps on the insistence of the municipal president. Or Isaki is doing this perhaps because he wants to cut Damu down to size. So, there are several axes to grind on the part of Isaki, you cannot pin one reason down as the motive for Isaki encouraging Khader to participate. There are several things- personal, and social as well. Damu is growing in stature. Damu is growing in stature because he was the Betle Merchant's Association's president, and then he has got the cigarette agency, and now he is running for elections; he is on the side of the scavengers and that is kind of shaking up the societal order. So, things are spiralling out of control and they are worried that some

lowborn or some figure who is not suitable for that position may become the president of the municipality. So, the press steps in. The press in the guise of Isaki steps in, and he could have been encouraged by Joseph, but it is his word, it is his word. And the fact that is related to the owner of the press is also cannot be confirmed. There's a lot of exaggerated narratives floating about in the world of Tamarind History.

So it is a very very complex chapter the way you know Isaki maneuvers you know elbows into the good books of Abdul Khader. So, it is a fantastic chapter and there are examples of free indirect discourse, page 158. Page 158 'They would never actually be able to see it since it was sure to be banned the moment it was printed. There was no question it would make the front page in the newspapers and raise real debate in the courtroom about artistic freedom. It would be a terrible headache for the authorities, terrible headache for the politicians, but there was no avoiding it.' What is this 'it'? It is the magnum opus of Isaki, and you can see how the narrator is internalizing or focalizing on Isaki as his publications are talked about.

So, we have an example of a fantastic example of free indirect discourse there. 'It cannot be called a gun if it only fires cotton from his muzzle'. And then further down or on the same page we have a remarkable physical description of Isaki. We do not get a lot of physical descriptions of characters in this novel but we do get a detailed one of Isaki. And you can see how harsh the description is, it is almost a caricature, there is a lot of sarcasm and you can see the slant of the narrator through that physical description of Isaki.

He says 'More often than not, they were squinting...' his eyes were squinting, '...as though someone had taken a chisel and gouged out a line where his eyes should have then. As though somebody has sculpted a line instead of you know eyes, 'They disappeared completely when he laughed since he was a man who laughed all the time both genuinely and in pretence, the times when his eyes were actually visible were rare moments indeed.' So, he laughs quite a bit and he laughs and he pretends to laugh. There is pretence as well, hypocrisy as well. So, it is a very very sarcastic portrait of Isaki that you get.

The other interesting thing about the novel is that people easily spot craftiness, strategies, the schemes of the other. They just, you know, take a minute just a minute and then expose it and there is one example of that on page 159, 160.

When Isaki is trying to make money out of a new press in the neighborhood, and Francis kind of easily knows what are the motives behind Isaki's publishing an ad for Francis' press. So, craftiness schemes are laid bare the moment they are hatched. Conspiracies are easily found out. And then we have the word-play highlighted by Sourav when he was doing his presentation. So, the word play is interesting because of two reasons- the translation, the attention to the translation kind of comes to the surface in that particular moment. And secondly, the emphasis on sexuality, talk about sexuality is also illustrated. The 'kalvi kalavi', it makes sense only if you know the Tamil language otherwise it does not make a lot of sense. So, the translator deliberately stuck to the original Tamil terms to make that point about education and sexuality.

I would also want you to think about that reference, the old widow, a subject brought up by that book keeper of Abdul Khader. The book keeper is interesting because he will switch loyalties later on. He will go over to Damu and he will expose some of the information about Khader. So, the subject of the rich old widow, once again is tied to that you know theme of skewed gender identities which is one of the key subtext to the novel.

Page 167 'What kind of man leaves a newspaper and press to that stupid bitch who cleans his house?' Again ties into as I said the lopsided representation of femininity. In the same chapter, we had an old widow you know with a lot of money who could adopt the book keeper and then he kind of longs for that. And then a few pages down the line, we have somebody who is owning the press because of her influence with the previous owner.

Page 169, 'Khader looked at Isaki for a minute or so. He saw the face of an innocent child and the face of a master comedian.' Both the innocent child and the master comedian are acts that he puts on for the benefit of Abdul Khader so that he can be influenced into participating in the election.

The most important section in this chapter is on page 172: how Isaki very casually brings in the ideas of chopping the tamarind tree. And you realize that doing away with the tamarind tree would metaphorically cut down the strength of Damu. Because they believe that getting rid of the Tamarind tree would get rid of the financial pillars of Damu and his family and that in turn will affect the results of the electoral process. So, it is you can see how this is connected- the presence of the tamarind tree is connected to the petty politics of the human beings occupying that space. It is a very simple logic but it is powerful logic. It picks up. Khader buys that. Isaki says that 'I am making sense brother. I have thought carefully about it. I'm saying his business has got nothing to

do with this stuff he actually sells. You can get the same things in a hundred stores around here. His business is totally due to the shade. Get rid of the shade and his business will collapse. Don't doubt it for a second.' If his business collapses, the cigarette agency will just vanish from his clutches. His wealth will vanish and then he will not have a lot of ground for winning in the municipality elections. And the seat of the president will be safe. So, lots of things can be sorted out- his social climbing as well as the threat to the position of the existing municipal president.

And you can see how Isaki is going to employ his pen to get rid of the tamarind tree. He says 'Let me get my hand on that cracked pen and have it fill a few pages and pretty soon the tamarind tree will be heading past you in the back of a lorry when you come to open the shop.' So, he kind of draws attention to the power of the rhetoric, the power of language. It does not have to be a language that captures reality, it just has to be powerful, it just has to win over the minds of the population and you will get what you want.

Chapter 13. In sorting out the elections. So the public face of the novel and the private face, if you try to understand these two kind of trajectories. it will make a lot of meaning for you. Now, you know once Khader comes into the fray, you can see how the press takes Damu apart with its editorials. 'Everybody knew that once Isaki had found a sewer to start ripping open, he would not stop until he had dug as deep and wide as he needed to go, so they had great faith in him.' So, once again the election becomes a carnival, a spectacle. And there is another important motive for Isaki in drawing Khader in. It makes the battle more interesting, isn't it? It makes the battle more interesting and that would mean a lot of sales for the paper. You can see how the communal politics is exploited in order to split the votes. So, that interesting part of the process is laid bare.

Now, let us talk about Grandpa Peanut. He is a man who sells peanuts outside the mosque and he is very popular with the children. He is a every old man, very poor and he reminds of the figure in Sundara Ramaswamy's short story 'Reflowering' that you know he has resemblance to that old man, the blind old man with a big family. So, a similar figure is Grandpa Peanut. And once he is roped in, and that is the strategy of Damu, Damu ropes in Grandpa Peanut to split the votes, to take the votes away from Abdul Khader. So, instead of having one Islamic figure, there are two Islamic figures against Damu. So, Damu hopes that by splitting the votes he will get a sizable number of the votes which will make him win the election for the thirteenth ward. And the community in that thirteenth ward start to kind of rally around grandpa peanut because he is such an old man, so poor,

and he is all the time in the sun selling all these peanuts to kids. And the woman kind of support him whole-heartedly. And you get lots of comments about that. And he also gets cash inflow. Grandpa Peanut gets a cash inflow; he is allowed to ride in a car to sign the papers. And as he is going towards the office to sign papers, he gets all the children to ride with him and he also takes the children of Abdul Khader to have a ride with him in the car.

So, he's a figure who's heartwarming in his generosity, and Abdul Aziz, the father-in-law of Abdul Khader, comes by to pay him a visit and asks him to withdraw from the election. So, you can see, regardless of the, you know, the souring of the relationship between the father-in-law and the son-in-law, he still has his loyalties toward the man who married his daughter. So, he comes by, Aziz, and asks him (Grandpa Peanut) to withdraw. And that conversation is pretty interesting. So the general theme, you know, the rich versus poor all these are mentioned.

He says, the old guy, peanut, Grandpa Peanut says, 'Rich people always stick together. It doesn't matter what caste they are of, which God they worship. Anyway why don't you want to tell your son-in-law to drop out if you want one of us to win so much? That's what I would say.' And the entire neighborhood kind of comes to support him and things get ugly. And there is a lot of screaming of curses and you know Abdul Aziz escapes from that really harsh turn of affairs.

Chapter 14. The metaphor of war is used to describe the battle between Khader, Damu, and Grandpa Peanut, especially the battle between Khader and Damu. 'Hearing the sorts of things they were saying, it seemed as though they had conjured up a war of opposing armies with Khader gaining ground on the battlefield through devilish strength, and Damu who up to that point had been leading a tireless offensive, now beating a confused retreat after having being put to flight.'

And there is this issue of having the tree cut and that picks up a lot of the space of conversation among the population. And page 185, you can see how Isaki kind of puts up a big battle, a big show of strength to have the tree removed. And he starts the sketch from the old legends of Chellatayi. And he also points out that at some point the British wanted to get rid of the tree but some corrupt official managed to retain it. So, the tamarind tree once again becomes the focus of the battle between two sections of the population. Damu wanting to have the tree right there, wanting to protect it, and we have the other group Khader wanting to get rid of it and we have Isaki, the municipal group with the president at his head, all kind of supporting to have the tree destroyed. So, the last few moments of the novel becomes the story about kind of protecting or

rejecting the symbol of tradition which has been there on the scene for ages together. And look at the way the tree is kind of figuratively portrayed- page 187 Kambaramayanam Anandan Pillai, he says that 'If you really want to wipe the tilak of a married woman's forehead then go ahead and do it. I just hope that God forgives you.' So, taking the tree away from that landscape is like turning a woman into a widow. So, that is the analogy of the tree.

And there are also lots of reasons put forward by the municipality to get rid of the tree. They say that the best course of action would be to get rid of the tamarind tree so that no such untoward events would occur in the future. Untoward events being the theft of the pods, the smashing of the sign. So everything is kind of connected to the presence of the tree itself.

The case against Damu fails and he is completely cleared of the charges. The police are not able to prove the fact that he was the one who instigated the scavengers to thieve the pods as well as to get the sign smashed. Page 191. Damu, poaches the bookkeeper who worked for Abdul Khader, Abdul Khader is no longer able to pay him. So, the book keeper switches sides to Damu's. My page 191 'To Damu's mind, bringing in a man who had such long experience managing the accounts of a wholesale cigarette business would be quite a coup. The bookkeeper accepted the offer-' and it is the bookkeeper who shows his loyalty, new loyalty to his new master by telling him about the reasons for getting rid of the tree. The reasons that Khader and Isaki and everybody had come up with for getting rid of the tree. And that is to attack the financial capabilities of Damu.

Page 194. 'And how would a man with no principles know what's offensive? Here you have got someone involved in the black market who comes up with the scheme to destroy an independent business man and he has found a hack with a pen to promote it. But even still, where is the law in this country that says a civilized municipality has to go through with it?'

Now, this set of ideas kind of sums up the nature of the anti-Damu group. So, the anti-Damu group has enlisted the help of all these, to make sure that he loses the election. So, Damu kind of very cleverly sees through the plot and that ties in with the early point that I made- that everybody knows the stratagem of the other. Conspiracies are easily exposed.

Chapter 15, the last chapter. So what does Damu do to save it, the last attempt of saving the tamarind tree- they turn the tree into a god. That is Damu's last card that he plays. So what they do is overnight they remove a bark from the tree and embed the face of an idol, a female goddess,

onto the tree and the whole is transformed into a kind of a sacred site. It becomes a carnival, people come by- swamis and all the rishis, and then there are musicians, troops of musicians, and different kinds of regional artists descend on the place to make sure that nobody is sent over to cut down the tree. In fact, the place becomes so crowded and so clogged with people that busses have to be rerouted. The traffic has to be rerouted and nobody can arrive at the place who can destroy the tamarind tree. So, I am going to read that section because it is pretty exciting to read it. You get a sense of the resurgence of tradition to safeguard itself against the onslaught of corruption. Corruption, progress, and other kinds of factors which are antithetical to principles of the past.

Page 197. 'A Goddess festival was in full swing in front of the tamarind tree. A Goddess festival. Saffron was smeared thickly on her forehead...' the forehead of the Goddess '...and green stones sparkled in her eyes. The sunlight glinting off them in sparkling bursts. All over the junction the air was heavy with the sweet smell of incense. Everyone there had stripes of sandal paste on their foreheads. It seemed as though the face of every pious Hindu in town had converged for this one event. The number of beards in the crowd was impossible to miss. They belong to well-known swamis who led garlanded devotees up through the mountains on the Aiyayan pilgrimage.' And there are stellar figures, stellar religious figures. 'People were having a great time laughing about how the man who had been hired to cut down the tamarind tree was now heading back home, having sent notice to the municipality that there was no way he was going to cut the tree down.'

Now, he can't even get at the tree because of the religious crowd thronging around the tree. So it's a master strategy pulled off by Damu at the last minute to save the tamarind tree. And then something very very shocking happens. Something unexpected happens which is that the body of Coolie Aiyayan, the dead body of Coolie Aiyayan is found near the tamarind tree. In fact somebody says that he was stabbed very grievously and then he was taken away by the people to the hospital where he confesses and dies.

So, what is this story about Coolie Aiyayan? So we have a kind of a flashback, and what does this flashback impart? So Coolie Aiyayan is in the pay of Damu. He has been regularly getting money from Damu, and Damu used to give him money so that he does not kind of affect the court case which was ongoing about the smashing of the sign. So once the case was closed, that no harm was done to Damu we have Coolie Aiyayan regularly visiting Damu again to extort money from

him. So, you know Damu obviously gets fed up and he says I am not going to give you any more money. At one point he refuses him, and at that point he turns to Abdul Khader, his old master.

So what he does is he tells Khader that he can destroy the tamarind tree secretly. He can murder the tamarind tree secretly. And he does that. He gets hold of some mercury and some poison, mixes it up, stabs the tree, you know pours poison into the tree, covers up the hole that he punctures into the tree. And when he is in the act of doing it, some of the supporters of Damu who have been participating in the election campaign, notice him in the middle of the night climbing down from the tree and they attack him with a knife. And that is why he has been killed. So, they try to save the tree. Doctors are called in, tree physicians are called in and they try to save the tree to no effect. All the leaves from the tree wither off, soon it has completely shed all its leaves and it is declared as dead. So the place turns into a kind of a graveyard with all the shops kind of shutting up because the crowd moves away from the place. And that's the kind of history that this young narrator is trying to sketch.

Let me read some excerpts to give you a sense of the tragedy that kind of befalls on the community where the tamarind tree once stood. (Page) 205- 'It was no longer a tree, no longer a God. Just a corpse. It was the time of year when the summer wind had started to blow. The tamarind tree danced pointlessly in the breeze, a life that had slipped away. It was painful to watch. The tree looked revolting.' The tree looked revolting. Revolting is a very interesting word to use there. Page 207- 'The axe bit into the trunk of the tamarind tree-' so somebody eventually comes to kind of cut away, cut off the dead tree and take it away. ' "If you really want to wipe the tilak of a married woman's forehead, then go ahead and do it. I just hope that God forgives you," Kambaramayanam Anandan Pillai told the town council. Yet for everyone who saw the tamarind tree standing there at the crossroads, even if it was only once in their life, it is clear that it is nothing but ruin there now, and the vacant crossroads look like a lonely widow.' So, even if the tree is no longer there, the name sticks. The name sticks to that place, 'That habit is the only memorial to the life of the tamarind tree. Even though the form is gone, the name, it would seem will never be destroyed.'

And every interestingly, the novel ends with Grandpa Peanut. Gradually the cash inflows stops. The flow of cash into his family stops even though he has won the election, his clothes become ragged again, he is not able to wear fancy clothes, he no longer rides in a car. And then there comes a point that he has to sell all the pans he bought with the money that he was offered by other

groups. And he returns outside of the mosque to selling peanuts again. So, it is a reversal, it is back to his original position. So he goes back and opens the snack box, I mean the candy box that he uses to sell, and all the children gather around him and you know there is joy in their welcome. 'Grandpa Peanut looked blankly at the children's faces. His face broke into a smile. His eyes welled up with tears.'

We have Damu moving away from the place. We have Abdul Khader's wife returning back to her father's house, Khader being arrested. So, all these things kind of indicate that things fall back into their usual positions. There is a kind of a change, there is a rise of the part of all these figures, but after all these complications involving elections and other self-events, things fall back in their regular order, usual order. So that is how the novel ends.

Student: Hi, so I will be summarizing chapter 13 of Sundara Ramaswamy's 'Tamarind History'. So, till from chapter twelve we understood that Isaki has conspired with Abdul Khader to make him stand in the election against Damu. And chapter thirteen deals with the ways in which they are trying to split the vote and canvas people. So, we see that in the beginning of chapter thirteen, Abdul Khader has decided to stand for the election for the post of president in the municipal council.

So, Travancore Nesan publishes an article with Abdul Khader's photo in the same size of- the text emphasizes that '...it was in the same size as of Damu's.' And Ramaswamy writes that everybody praises the paper's objectivity in running the article without any bias. So, but the immediately next sentence is that, 'No-one was surprised by the editorial the following day which attacked Damu mercilessly and asked every self-respecting in the thirteenth ward to make sure they cast their votes for Khader.'

So, it's quite ironic. So now we are given a full page of description of how the election fever starts and what is happening in the thirteenth ward. So, we see that there are political rallies, political leaflets being distributed, and there are so many speech-makers coming in. And Ramaswamy describes these speechmakers as workers, so that is also quite interesting that he called them 'miracle-workers who seemed capable of talking for hours without once stopping to take a pause.'

So then we are given a brief insight into Damu's mind. So Damu's stand is that all of his calculations are going wrong because he had planned to split the communal votes and earn all the

Muslim votes. But now since Abdul Khader is now in the picture, he is afraid that he is going to lose so many of his votes. So, but still his friends- we are told that they are still giving him his complete support and- but they are also not sure that how much of the Muslim votes will Damu be able to retain because so many of the women's votes are going or going to be lost due to communal loyalty.

So, now we under- now Ramaswamy tells us that Damu's brother Chellappan, Damu comes up with a completely new strategy, a novel strategy, and so they make a person who is from the Muslim community, who sells peanuts in front of the Madarsa, a candidate. So, we see that this person who is living in kind of abject poverty is given a new dress and he is taken in a car to the election office and he signs up for the election, standing for the post of president. So, now we have three people competing- Damu, the Grandpa Peanut as this person is called, and Khader. So, Damu's plan is to split the community votes so that Damu can win. So, now we will see that this is quite brilliant actually, because Damu and his brother are targeting the madarsa. So Grandpa Peanut sells peanuts in front of the madrasa, so they know that Grandpa Peanut has got kind of a strong hold, knowing all these people and etcetera. And having a sizable amount of people who will go by him.

So, now we see Abdul Khader's father-in-law Aziz, who we come to know in chapter 9 and 10. So, Abdul Khader's father-in-law comes in, comes to the town from wherever he is living and he is afraid that if things go the way Damu thinks, then Khader is going to lose. So, he goes to the place of Grandpa Peanut and tries to convince him to step off the competition. But the Grandpa Peanut is quite bitter, because apparently he says that, '...a few years ago your son-in-law,' he is talking to Aziz who is Khader's father-in-law, so he says that Khader had once sent his lawyers and sent him '....a collection notice of ten years for a pair of lungis I owed him.' So, we see that Khader's old mischiefs are coming back at him. So he says, 'Go and rip out your tongue and then die.' So, he is quite bitter and justifiably quite mad at Aziz for coming into the town.

So, now we will see Abdul Aziz, he is being assaulted by everybody in the household and he manages to run away. So, this is chapter thirteen. So it is a brief snapshot of what is going on during the election in the days which precede the election. So, we will see what happens in the next chapter later.

Student 2: Chapter 14 picks up from where chapter thirteen left off and talks about how the decision to cut the tamarind tree was passed by the council. And the previous chapter dealt with how Damu reacted to Khader's strategies, and this one deals with how Khader puts into place his own machinations for success.

So Isaki's plan to mobilize the town, so to speak, in favour of cutting the tamarind tree works. And his paper, *The Travancore Nesan*, sells a lot of copies on account of this. And Isaki picks up old stories, old legends about the tamarind tree- forgotten histories- and manages to make a case for why the tamarind tree should be cut. Khader is thrilled about this because Isaki does this in a very clever way, he mobilizes support by using people who write letters to the editor by taking very commonplace concerns, such as how the tamarind tree cuts off, the branches of the tamarind tree cut off electricity every time they touch wires, and he puts in place some very practical reasons for why the tree should be cut. He doesn't appeal much to emotion.

But, the opposition to this is that the tamarind tree has been a central part of town. And you see Kambaramayanam Anandan Pillai saying that it's always been part of town, it's tradition, you cannot cut it down, it's a holy place, and so on. Khader is extremely delighted about this because he sees Damu losing ground, and he also sees Damu being worried, because Damu does not know why Khader wants the tree to be cut, but all he knows is that Khader Khader wants it to be so. And that is enough to worry him.

While Khader is ecstatic that the tree is going to be cut down, it's because he is losing ground, it is because that he *was* losing ground until this decision came through in the local election. Because amongst the voters, amongst the Muslim voters, Grandpa Peanut was more popular than Khader was. And Grandpa Peanut had sympathy because he was an old man who had a hard life, while Khader was seen as young and scheming.

Now, Khader is fairly confident that he is going to win and this worries Damu. And Damu poaches Khader's bookkeeper and offers some higher salary because Khader is so immersed with the election and his coalesced hatred against Damu that he lets his business slip, and his business starts to fail. Which means that he doesn't have stock, he doesn't have many customers, and the people who work for him start to slip away one by one. The bookkeeper is the last man to leave, and he goes over to Damu's side. And the bookkeeper is, I suppose, practically very eager to show Damu that he is on his side and that he has no more loyalties left to Khader. So, he tells Damu and

Chellappan and the rest of Damu's coterie, the reason why Khader is so anxious to have the tree cut. It's because Khader believes that if the tamarind tree goes, then the shade goes, and so will all the people who loiter in the shade and hence they won't stop by Damu's store anymore. We don't see Damu's reaction to this, but we do get the sense that he's plotting something with the bookkeeper and with the rest of his gang as has been going on throughout the book. It is then that Damu comes up with a resolution saying that the tamarind tree is sacred, and that it is, it holds a huge place in the sentiments of the Hindus, and that it should not be cut. And they take it to the council, where Joseph, M.C Joseph, the head of the council says that, it's not possible because the motion to cut the tree was passed by the council which is mainly composed of majority of Hindus and this devolves into a religious argument where M.C Joseph backs out, and Damu and Anandan Pillai, who is also a strong supporter of letting the tree stay as a religious and sacred symbol walk away. And this is where chapter 14 ends with, you can sense a religious tension and it moves on to chapter fifteen which is the last chapter in the book.

And chapter fifteen begins with a sort of past reference, and you can, you sort of get the sense that the tamarind tree has been cut. And it says that the tree was discussed as if it were a family affair, so it's on everybody's lips, it's in everybody's minds, and everyone is talking only about the tamarind tree. It is a huge deal because the town has coalesced around the tamarind tree, so to speak. So the way that chapter fifteen begins is for, is talking about a chaos that happens around the tamarind tree and this is when the, remember that we left off when Damu and Anandan Pillai walked away from the municipal council after having their plea rejected? And I suppose a couple of days later, because he just says 'One morning the tamarind tree had become a God.' So, you see that Damu's strategy is to make the tamarind tree into a God or a Goddess so to speak. And there are eyes and there is the face of the Goddess carved into the tree and everyone is worshipping it and with a symbol so overtly sacred and religious they know that the municipality cannot touch the tree without causing a full scale uproar.

And this is quite a clever strategy. And Khader is deeply deeply embittered by this because now he does not have the pleasure of, he believes he will not have the pleasure of seeing Damu lose, neither will he have the pleasure of seeing himself win, because Grandpa Peanut is more popular amongst the Muslim voters than he is.

With this furor going on the people who have been assigned the task of cutting the tree cannot even make it to the tree. And things are left alone for a few days. But a few days later, the narrator sees that there is another furor around the tamarind tree, and this time it is because Coolie Aiyyapan has been found dead there, and it seems that he has been stabbed. This causes more uproar, because Coolie Aiyyapan as we saw somewhere in the previous chapters, had been missing, he had absconded, and nobody had any idea where he had been. And now he turns up and he is dead. And the backstory to Coolie Aiyyapan is now given, which is that, when he fled he was harbored by Khader for a while, and then he was harbored by Damu. But then Damu decided that he could not put up with him any longer, so he sent him away. Except Coolie Aiyyapan began to demand money from Damu which Damu decided it was best to pay, in case Coolie Aiyyapan damaged his chances in the election of winning, of garnering, votes.

This goes on for a while and then Damu decides that he cannot play this game any longer and sends him away once and for all. Which is when Coolie Aiyyapan has gone to Khader and offers to kill the tamarind tree, so that Khader can maybe not win but have the pleasure of seeing Damu lose. Because now Aiyyapan's motive is revenge against Damu, which Khader agrees to. So one night, Coolie Aiyyapan manages to cull out a piece of the tree and pour in some mercury and poison. And it is when he is making his escape from the tree that he is found by three of Damu's men who are enraged and suspect quite rightly that he's doing something to damage the tree, and in the fight that breaks out, Aiyyapan ends up dead.

The book then goes on to talk about how the tree is dead, and how it has been there for a really long time, and how it has witnessed the ups and downs of the town, how it has witnessed the creation of the town, and then it jumps back to the present state of affairs which is that both Damu and Khader are arrested. Khader is sentenced to a long jail term which he serves out in Trivandrum. And Damu is released but has no encouragement or enthusiasm left to continue the election. So, he moves with his family back to the town where he came from and sets up a dairy farm.

And the tamarind tree is dead, which causes something close to riots. The government imposes a strict curfew and this is as close to a huge event that is happening since the independence, that you can see in the town of this size, which is really small which is way down the south of the country, which is fairly unaffected by the independence movement, apart from his local heroes like Damu. And after all of this it is, it sort of returns to normal at the end of it you see that people move on

with their lives, that there are outbreaks of violence directed at Khader's store at Isaki's office, but neither of them are hurt.

But the narrator keeps going forward to say that years later '...when I come back I think of the tamarind tree and other people think of the tamarind tree, and we all wonder why it was necessary that the tamarind tree should have been cut.' And it seems like a very nostalgic, not nostalgic, but it seems like a very firm ending except the narrator then decides to focus on Grandpa Peanut, which I find quite funny. Because then they talk about Grandpa Peanut's fortune and says that the old man does not seem to be very concerned about whether the tamarind tree is dead or not. But he does realize that he can capitalize enormously on this. And he goes around to all the voters he knows saying that, look both of your candidates are corrupt and absolutely should not be in a position of the council which is why all of you should vote for me. And he does manage to succeed. He wins a lot of votes, he manages to be on the council for a while and he gets what the author calls the 'taste of the good life' for a while. So, his family knows no poverty for a few months, they have all the food they want, and all the nice things that they ever wanted. Except this does not last for very long, because Grandpa Peanut is, as one can guess, he is not very skilled in politics or in maneuverings. So his wealth fades away as does his position, and he goes back to selling sweets and bidis and snacks like a tuck-shop outside the madrasa. And you see that the children are really glad that Grandpa Peanut is back, that they probably missed him at his usual place in madrasa.

An ending like this gives a sense of how cyclical things are, so it is not a very teleological narrative that Sudara Ramaswamy has written. It seems to be cyclical, in the sense that she shows how a normalcy of sorts, or a new normalcy is established at the end of each event that is a major up or a major down in the life of the town or in lives of individuals. That is the end of the book.

Professor: Some more comments, this is a very difficult book, because it has a whole host of details. And I would suggest another rereading of the novel to get at all the details. Sometimes you think the wife is dead, but she is not dead she has just gone home to Ceylon maybe, as happens with the case of the press-owner. In her absence we have the cleaning lady occupying the shoes of the wife. So, all these details as to what happens, must be understood to get a full picture, so that you can make broad comments on the novel. So, do reread the novel to get a sense of the canvas.

It is a very harsh novel, it is a very bleak novel. It gives a really really harsh portrait of the society after the independence, in run up to and after the independence. There are plenty of betrayals, broken loyalties, failure in trade is a common theme. We have the rise of Gopala Iyer then his fall, we have the rise of Abdul Khader, his fall, the rise of Damu, his fall. The rise of grandpa peanut very briefly, and his fall.

So, Shweta's point is reasonable. It is valid in that it kind of shows us a cyclical nature to fortunes, but it also, I would argue, shows that things fall back to the usual place and position in this stratified society. There is kind of no getting out, social climbing is not as easy for the participants. So, people who try to climb the ladders are seen as big threats to the positions of the privilege. So, this novel accommodates the kind of social climbing that is undertaken on the part of the underdogs or the oppressed or the underprivileged.

And it also shows modernity as a failed project. We see the loopholes in the way the municipality is run, we see the loopholes in the electoral processes. So, we do not get shining models of modernity. We do not get a representation of trade as a kind of a free and fair practice. So, I would say that this representation is one kind of representation of this particular society at that point of time. And this is not the only representation which captures the various strands that are crisscrossing the society. We do have optimistic pictures of modernity, we do have happy domesticities which would have been enjoyed by men and women, happy childhoods, we would have enjoyed the progress of modernity. But that picture is not represented here that is not captured. So the point I am trying to make is just as Damu wanted his moment in the shining lights, just as Janardhanam wanted his moment in the shining lights of adulation, we also see the narrator trying to get his moment and he feels cheated when he cannot get it.

Page 135, 'All this took place soon after India had gained its independence and I was very discouraged by the fact that I had no chance to take part in it.' He had no chance to shine as a freedom fighter. 'I am not certain that this was the only reason but my friends and I followed everything about Damu's case with passionate interest.' They have no larger social goal, therefore they are diverted by the intricacies of plots hatched by Damu and other figures. So, in the lack of a national trajectory which captures the interest of an entire population, small gossips, small conspiracies, conflicts between trading parties, captures the imagination of young men such as the narrator. So, I want you to reread the novel so that you can get a great sense of this landscape.

Now, I want to come back to ideas about translation. I have here before me an article called 'Translation Tensions' written by Vimila Rao, published in I think Indian Literature Journal published by Sahitya academy. What she says about translation in a postcolonial postmodern poststructuralist world kind of sums up the various tensions related to this field. She says, especially in a postcolonial postmodern poststructuralist world, 'translation has taken on many meanings in different contexts.' So, the many meanings are being listed. 'The topic is made more difficult because of the belief of some self-conscious regional writers who maintain that the greater the superior quality of the regional work, the harder it is to translate.' Works that are very hard to translate are fantastic works, it is so raw, it is so connected to the region that it becomes difficult to translate into another language and therefore that work is superior that is why an argument.

'There are others who open that the regional writer does not need international prominence, he just needs prominence in his own language.' There is not even a need to be translated so that others can get a glimpse of the ways of life of a particular region, we do not need to be translated that is another argument. There are also those who believe that translation is an inferior, derivative kind of activity and translators are only blotting papers. You know that argument translation is not as good as the original. The novel in the original is not as good as the one translated by somebody. 'The claims to superiority of the regional writers and their writings are based on the quality of rootedness of culture and language within the limits of which they operate.' So, the superiority is connected to the kind or the intensity of being connected to the regional soil and regional culture. 'This limited ground is believed to invest their writing with honesty, originality, authenticity and purity.' So, all these elements are supposedly found in greater amounts in a regional work, which is also not very easy to translate.

I would say not necessarily, and I am open to other interpretations as well. 'Translation on the other hand, especially an English translation, would only dilute the stock and defeat all these qualities of the original.' That is one of the arguments thought to be valid. Not necessarily again.

Translations are important, significant for multiple reasons. Translations are important to showcase, to bring into a larger public domain the way of life of a particular region. And I have an example here quoted by the author she says it was Gayatri Chakravarti Spivak's English translation of Mahasweta Devi's Bengali short stories 'Breast Giver' and 'Dropdi' that brought into focus the inequalities of cultural and gender differences in the colonial society. These things would not have

been brought to the surface if not for translations. So, translations do a lot of cultural work, of recovery, of exposure. And there are also issues in which translations deliberately mistranslate, they'd deliberately not capture the essence of the original for certain reasons of its own, so that is another aspect.

So, in her book 'Gender and Translation' Sherry Simon, Sherry Simon maintains that just as European colonisers manipulated texts, just as European colonies manipulated text in the process of translating in order to control the colonized through language and culture, a translator with strong attitudes, say against women or women writers, would also manipulate the book that he or she is translating. So, there is scope for manipulation, misrepresentation, mistranslation for certain ideological purposes. So, that is also another trajectory that you might want to be conscious of- not rendering the essence of the original for the purpose of your own. So, these are some of the issues that are related to the idea of translation.

'Hybridity, hybridity rather than purity is the organizing principle.' Hybridity rather than purity is the organizing principle as Salman Rushdie has demonstrated in many of his path-breaking writings. 'The resulting translated text will be a product of mixed cultures, of the source language, as well as the target language.' So, there is hybridization going on because of the process of translation. 'As Homi baba puts it, we should remember that it is the *inter*, that it is the inter, the in-between, the cutting edge of translations and renegotiation, the in-between space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture.' The negotiation is important in the act of translation.

I think with that I will wind up. I just want to go back to our course contents and see if we have done justice to what we hoped to do over the course of this Regional Indian Literatures in Translation project. So, we have tried to look at literary snapshots of Indian histories, folklore, societal structures such as class and gender, and the aspirations and struggles of men and women who have lived through the diverse Indian spaces across the length and breadth of the country.

We looked at a whole array of men and women represented in literature. Can we look at the list, Suma, of the texts? So, Tagore's from Tagore's 'Hunger of Stones', to Basheer, Sathe's 'Gold from the Grave', Gulzar's 'Crossing the Ravi', Pritam. So, we do remember all these men women who are caught who are caught in the histories of colonization in 'Hunger of Stones', who are caught in supernatural narratives such as Basheer's 'Blue Light', who are caught in the conflicts of partition, who are caught you know in the narratives of folktales and legend.

So, we tried to see the logic and the reasons behind that idea of entrapment suffered by men and women. And I think Amrita Pritam's story is fantastic in that regard which shows the capture of a male psyche in the politics of patriarchy as well. So, that is a fantastic story in that regard. 'The Man Who Could Not Sleep' talked about agency, social climbing, and the pitfalls of social climbing.

And then 'Tamarind History' of course, it gives a larger canvas of the failed projects in the post-independence period. We did look at, so instead of 'Jejuri' we looked at some other poems, Perspective, Mother Tongue, Geetanjali, I hope you can recall some of the early lectures that we had for this course.

What are the most memorable texts that you have read in this one? What comes to mind when you think of regional Indian literatures? I think of bluebell wood, you know from Pritam's story. The fact that you're not, that your auditory senses are suppressed at certain pockets in regional landscapes. You're made not to listen to certain voices as you walk through the landscape of regional literatures. And I think that is a fantastic metaphor to kind of think back and speculate on the reasons for not listening to various voices that cry out from these landscapes. So, we are trying to kind of go against the grain and capture the various voices.

The voice of women such as Guleri. Guleri. We don't hear her so much, we don't hear her so much, but we kind of recreate what would be her, you know, desires and demands and cries as she kind of goes through a painful process of self-elimination. So, go for the unheard voices, and in fact even a course such as this, Regional Indian Literatures is a course which is going against the canonical grain. Indian literature is the canon. So, this is speaking to the canon, Regional Indian Literatures is speaking to the canon saying that, yes we have other voices which need to be heard and talked about and discussed. And we sometimes don't even realize that some of the, you know, landmark texts are translated texts as well. So, go look for different translations and find out what the differences are. Any other responses to the course?

What are some of the major preoccupations of the texts? The major preoccupation, the one major preoccupation which can tie up all the texts? Obsession with the female gender can tie up every text almost, listed on the course. Sometimes the obsession may not be overt. It will be subtle. But the presence, the presence of conflicting versions of femininity would neatly tie up all these texts.

The unreliability of narratives as well. The postmodern unreliability of narratives which comes up in from Tagore to Karnad to Tamarind history- the role of multiple narratives which kind of defeat that one overarching grand narrative offering a particular point of view on anything. It is deeply poststructuralist in the sense that we are going for the marginalized voices. So, that in itself is a poststructuralist tendency, to capture the less heard of.

The postcolonial baggage is pretty clear in Tamarind History as well, because we have an entire population of young men who do not know what project to embark on once independence is over. So, and the vestiges of feudalism also kind of confuse the scenes, they do not know which path would be ideal path to pick up. And Gopala Iyyer is a fantastic representative of the confusion as to what is the best possible profession that he could continue to occupy himself with. So, this course has a lot of material, this has got plenty. The thing is you need to invest a lot of time with the details of the text and with the help of theoretical lenses, you can see where these texts lead you to. Thank you for your patience and cooperation. It has been a pleasure.