

Modern Indian Writing and Translation
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Lecture 06
Week 2 Lecture 2: The Blue Light (Part - 2)

Length: 55:00

Hello, and welcome to the session on The Blue Light. For today's class, we are continuing the close reading of this story. Now I have Priyamvada to my left. She will be reading a section of the story and will be unpacking the story for you.

Student: "I spent a long time pacing the rooms. I spent a long time standing at the windows. There was nothing unusual. I tried to read something but could not concentrate. The chair remained empty. Let me go to sleep early, I thought. I made my bed and turned off the lamp. Then I wanted to play a song. I lit the lamp again, opened the gramophone, fitted a new needle into the playing arm and then I wound up the machine.

Whose song should I play? The world was still and silent. Then an uncanny whooshing filled both my ears like the wind, like the sea, and then absolute quiet again. Fear seized me. I must shatter this ominous silence into a thousand pieces. Whose song would best serve that purpose? I looked through my collection and chose a record of the black American singer, Paul Robeson. The gramophone began playing a man's voice, rich and majestic 'Joshua fought the Battle of Jericho'.

That song ended, Pankaj Mullick was next. Tu Dar Na Zara Bhi- you do not be afraid at all. The next was a sweet, soft and alluring voice Kaatranile Varum Geetham, the song that arrives on the breeze and in time MS Subalakshmi finished that song. Somehow after these three songs, I was at peace. I sat quietly for quite a while. Finally, I invited Saigal in. He sang in his languid voice, full of melancholy and sweetness, Soja Rajkumari Soja - Go to sleep princess, may beautiful dreams visit your sleep.

That also ended. That is all for now. The rest tomorrow. I said aloud and lowering the lid of the gramophone, lit a bidi, turned off the lamp and went to bed. Next to me, I had the torch, a watch and a dagger, also the empty chair. I close the doors to the veranda before getting into bed. It must have turned 10 now. I lay alert, my ears trained to the night.

Professor: Thank you. Okay, Catherine, what do you think of this section? I think this section occurs roughly in the middle of the story. It is a very interesting section. What are your thoughts on this?

Student: Ma'am, I think this section is very interesting because he is sort of admitting to the readers that he is in the grip of a kind of fear, which so long he has failed to confront, possibly because of a sense of bravado, or this notion that it is a female ghost and it is not really going to do anything to me. But Bhargavi is always present in the room, in his thoughts as a sort of an absent presence so to speak.

Professor: Yes.

Student: And the blue light, like his fear is the only tangible glimpse that we have of Bhargavi.

Professor: Yeah. Let me just pick up on that idea of fear, which is kind of very, very apparent in the section. If you could see, he says, fear seized me, just kind of grasped me. He just says that aloud for the readers, and there is something tangible as the cause for that kind of fear to grip him and what is that cause? He says that an uncanny whooshing sound filled my ears, a strange sound, like the wind, like the sea, then absolute quiet again. So we have the perfect paraphernalia of Gothic stuff going on here—the weird noises, that noises of the natural elements, and he wants to shatter this kind of noise and he does something to kind of carry out that plan. He says, 'I must shatter this ominous silence into a thousand pieces,' and then he asks whose song would best serve that purpose? So he thinks that the songs will aid him in this regard and he plays a few records. And I think I will allow you to see what these songs are like so that you get a sense of the weapons, the arsenal that this guy has to deal with this female ghost.

Student: Choice of songs is also interesting.

Professor: Yeah.

Student: Because at first he is sort of pacifying, consoling himself saying, you do not be afraid at all. And towards the end, it is like he is trying to appease the ghost.

Professor: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. You don't be afraid at all. He is telling himself right, not to be anxious and fearful. And then look at the next song, the song that arrives on the breeze, if you connect that with that earlier statement there, the whooshing filled my ears.

So he is trying to offset the immense fear that is associated with that kind of noise by associating it with something sweet and soft and alluring. So he is, he is doing a perfect battle against this ghost and then he has turned that kind of wind that turbulence into a kind of a sweet song on the breeze, Kaatranile Varum Geetham. So let us play those three songs for the audience.

[Song being played from 5:34 to 7:36]

Professor: Okay, if you take a minute to think about this song, I am not going to do a kind of a biblical reading of this allusion. But one thing that strikes us is the fact that the walls came tumbling down. I mean, it is a notion of surrender. And we have this idea of battle and the idea of triumph. So he is kind of symbolically, kind of facing out this spirit, this Gothic creature. So we need to remember the struggle, even though that struggle is kind of a subtext under the romantic veneer that is kind of woven into the story. So that is the kind of context for the first song. We can have Paul Robeson sing it as well and play it later on Youtube. Let us go on to Pankaj Mullick song.

[Song being played from 8:28 to 11:07]

Professor: If you watch this entire song or listen to it very carefully, you will also see the reference to Mira. She is adorning the persona of Mira longing for that blue-coloured Lord. Balakan, that is a Neela Balakan, that is what she longs for. And that has a kind of association with that earlier back embedded story of this Bhargavi. Isn't it? Her longing for her lover who betrays her. So the idea of longing is also connected with this kind of song.

So my question is in connection with that last section that she read, which says 'that's all for now, the rest tomorrow, I said aloud.' He says, 'Okay, I am done with all these songs and he says, and he lowers the lid of the gramophone, lit a bidi, turned off the lamp and went to bed. Next to me, I had the torch, a watch and a dagger, and also the empty chair.' What is the purpose of the empty chair? Dagger, we can quickly realize, that's for protection, that's for defence.

So if she does throttle him, he will put up a fight. He is ready for that. He was ready with the mantra and he tried out certain mantras through these romantic songs and then he has this dagger and an empty chair. What is the significance of the empty chair? Catherine, any, any thoughts on this?

Student: I think he is sort of letting the ghost know that he does not have any antagonistic or hostile feelings towards her. That she is always welcome to take her place on the chair.

Professor: Absolutely.

Student: That despite protecting himself with a dagger, he wants to make it clear to the ghost.

Professor: Yeah.

Student: No hard feelings.

Professor: Yeah, absolutely. She is welcome.

Student: Yes.

Professor: She is welcome to sit beside, have a chat. So that is indicated. Even if you look at the previous section, he pulls a chair for her when he is writing, right? He pulls a chair for her as well, have a seat, just don't stand behind me. So that idea of welcoming her for a conversation about all things literary and musical, that is very, very radical. I would think he kind of crosses all kinds of borders here. There is a lot of transgression going on. And that is admirable, to welcome a woman and to participate in these kind of conversations is something very new and terribly modern for that period and that is interesting. Okay, can we move on to the next section of the story?

Student: "Minutes passed and hours. There was no fear in my mind. What there was, was a cold wakefulness. This was not new to me. I had had some unusual experiences in my life over the years, in many lands, many places during my lonely life of 20 years, none of which I could find the meaning of. Because of this, my attention constantly shifted between the past and the present.

Would there be a knock at the door? Would there be the sound of water flowing from the taps? Would I be throttled in my sleep? I stayed awake and vigilant till 3 in the morning, I heard nothing, felt nothing. Finally, I fell into a deep tranquil sleep. I did not have a single dream. I woke up at 9 the next morning. Nothing had happened.

Good morning, Bhargavikutti, thank you so much. I have understood one thing for certain, people are spreading false rumours about you. Let them talk no. Who cares? My days and nights passed in this manner. I would think of Bhargavikutti, her mother, father, siblings. There must be so many unknown stories. I wrote most nights. When I got tired, I played

records, I would announce the singer, the content, the mood and so on before the song began, I would say, here Pankaj Mullick, the great Bengali singer. The song is filled with sadness and invokes memories. These are bygone times you know, listen carefully. Guzar Gaya Wo Zamana Kaisa Kaisa - How wonderful were those days that are gone now? Or else I would say and now Bing Crosby - in the moonlight, it means Oh, I beg your pardon. You must know you are a graduate. I would talk like this to myself.

Two and a half months passed. I planted a garden. When flowers appeared, I said, all the flowers are for Bhargavikutti. In the meantime, I finished writing a short novel. Many of my friends visited me. At times, some stayed overnight. Before going to bed, I would go downstairs without their knowing it and I would look into the darkness and whisper, 'Bhargavikutti listen, some friends of mine are here. Do not strangle them. If you do, the police will arrest me. Be careful. Good night.' Usually before going out I would say 'Bhargavikutti, take care of the house. If any thieves get in, you can strangle them. Do not leave the bodies here though, dump them some miles away or we will be in trouble.' When I returned from cinema after a late show, I would announce, 'It is me.' All this I said in the newness of the first days. As time passed I forgot Bhargavi. Well, my long chats to her stopped. I would still remember her occasionally. But that was all. I will tell you what sort of remembering that was.

Millions have died since human life began in this world. Haven't countless men and women died? All of them have mingled with this earth as smoke or dust. We know this. Bhargavi was reduced to a memory of that kind.

Professor: Thank you Aparna. What are your thoughts on this, Karnalius, on the section?

Student: This section is mostly about the monologue. I mean, like, this section describes about how the protagonist is in a monologue with Bhargavi. So this section is also talking about loneliness. If we take in intertextuality of the Gothic story by HG Wells, the Red Room in which at the end of the story, it tries to convey a message saying that everything is one's own mind creation. So it is somewhat similar here.

And the other part is like, the section which talks about, 'or else I would say, and now Bing Crosby in the moonlight, it means, oh, I beg your pardon, you must know you are a graduate.' This part I think, shows the elitist view because during that period, a female being a graduate is a very huge thing. So it is my, this is my take from this section.

Professor: Yes, okay, good, good, good. Let me just rephrase the idea of solidarity which is interesting. We can kind of map it on to other aspects of that section. So he is striking a collegiality, a kind of an intimacy with the female ghost and let me pick out certain lines from that section that Aparna read out. Let us go back to it, once again. He says, 'Bhargavikutti take care of the house. '

No, sorry, even before that one, when his friends visit, he goes downstairs and he looks into the darkness and whispers 'Bhargavikutti, listen, some friends of mine are here, do not strangle them. If you do, the police will arrest me,' right? So what he is implying is that the ghost is on his side. He kind of prejudges that. He assumes that she is sympathetic towards him. So that solidarity is struck by him.

He takes the initiative to do it which is very clever of him. And if you look at the next reference to the thieves, he says, 'If any thieves get in, you can strangle them, do not leave the bodies here though, dump them some miles away, or we will be in trouble.' He does not say I will be in trouble. He kind of presents a picture of unity to the ghost herself. So what he is doing is he is appropriating her in some ways, and giving her the picture of domestic happiness in some sense, 'Okay, this is our house. If you do this, we will be in trouble.'

So that solidarity is very, very interesting, because that is again, a kind of an appropriation, a kind of a subversion of her powers. Her power to do him harm is subverted by the verbal pyrotechnics of this particular character, which is highly interesting.

And let's go back to that idea of stories, which I thought were interesting. He says, 'My days and nights passed in this manner, I would think of Bhargavikutti, her mother, father, siblings, there must be so many unknown stories.'

So many unknown stories, anything that strikes you about this comment? He does not say, her mother, father, siblings, there must be so many unknown relations or lives. He says unknown stories. They are all kind of narrativised for this writer. He is on the lookout for stories, right? So this idea of the story of Bhargavi, her relations are all a part and parcel of this kind of narrative text that we have and it has resonances when you come to the finale of this particular story.

Come to the last part that Aparna read. 'I will tell you what sort of remembering that was. Millions have died since human life began in this world. Have not countless men and women

died? All of them have mingled with this earth a smoke or dust. We know this. Bhargavi was reduced to memory of that kind.'

What is he trying to say here? What is he trying to say here? She lived, she died. She was alive. She turned into dust. So that is the kind of memory that I have. And our question here, the important question here is, why does he forget about her? He talks to her at length frequently, once he has moved in, and at some point, he kind of reduces the conversations with her. Why does he do that? So that question is interesting. Any thoughts on that?

Student: I think he is trying to convey a message that memories fades away with passage of time.

Professor: Yes, correct. Correct. We tend to forget, yes. That is one way to interpret his forgetfulness.

Student: Yes.

Professor: Time kind of makes us forget. What is the other one? What is the other one? He thinks that she is no longer threatening. He thinks that he has won her over, perhaps. He is not going to be harmed by this ghost. So that confidence makes him forget about his conversations with her. He does not have to daily appease her, charm her. Look at the previous section where he kind of grows flowers for her.

All this is for Bhargavikutti and then the reference to the graduate. He is kind of remembering the detail that she is a well educated woman. Can we just listen to those two songs that are referred to here in the section? Yeah please.

[Song being played from 22:54 to 24:12]

Professor: Can I just say or can I just ask, what are your thoughts on this particular song? What is he doing by playing this really kind of saddening song? You know all the good days are gone, he says in the song and there is that languorous tone, languid. What do you mean by the word languid used in connection with Pankaj Mullick's tone?

Early on if you go back to the previous section on page 75, he says 'he sang in his languid voice, full of melancholy and sweetness.' This is melancholy, there is a sweetness, there is a languid, languorous, relaxed tone which is not unattractive. In other words, it is very, very

attractive. So is he trying to feed the mood of the ghost by offering her all those nostalgia about the good old days when she was full of love for this guy who is no longer around?

So he is evoking all those sweet memories and he is kind of feeding that nostalgia. That seems to be one of the interpretations that we can safely make in connection with this song. Let us go back to Bing Crosby and see the mood there.

[Song being played from 25:34 to 26:31]

Professor: Okay, very superficial interpretation will tell us that the mood is changed drastically. There is a lot of lightness there. There is a lot of hope and positive feeling in this particular song. And as soon as that reference to the song has been complete, we have a reference to flowers being grown and offered by the narrator to Bhargavi. So, maybe a new romantic trajectory has been set off by this narrator for various purposes.

We are not very, very clear of the agenda, but he is trying to win the ghost over, that much is very clear. So that is the attitude that he has for this particular character whom he wants to appease. Now let's move on to the next section of the story where we have the crisis. The crisis in the story and its resolution. May I have two other students to join me for this session?

Student: "Then as life went by without any great event, something happened. That is what I am going to tell you about now. One night, it was 10 o'clock. From around 9, I had been writing a story. It was emotionally charged, and I was developing it briskly. I became aware that the light was getting dim. I lifted the lamp and shook it gently to check the oil. There was no kerosene. Still, I thought, let me write one more page.

I was entirely absorbed by the story I was writing and in the meanwhile, the light had faded. What could one do at a time like that? Check if there was oil in the lamp. That was what I did. I raised the wick a little. I continued writing. After a while, the light faded further, I raised the wick again, resumed my writing, the light dimmed again. Again, I raised the wick, eventually the wick turned into a smoking red ember 4 inches long.

I turned on my torch light and lowered the wick completely. The lamp was snuffed out. I said to myself, 'How can I get some light?' I needed kerosene. I could borrow some kerosene from the bank clerks' stove. I locked the door and went out with my torch and kerosene

bottle. I went down and out of the house, locking the front door behind me. I went down the path and out of the gate, latching it. I walked along the deserted road.

The faint moon lit my way. There were heavy clouds above too. So I strode along quickly. I came to the bank building and from the street called out the name of one of the bank clerks. I called out twice or thrice before one of them came down and opened the side gate. We went up using the staircase behind the building. I found that the three of them were playing a game of cards. When I talked about kerosene, one of them asked with a laugh, 'Couldn't you have asked your girlfriend to get you kerosene? Have you finished writing her love story?' I did not say anything. Must write, I thought.

Professor: Okay, thank you.

Student: So I think this part is setting up the story for the ghost's first appearance, most probably as a signification through the blue light.

Professor: Yeah.

Student: So and it is also mentioned that he is emotionally involved in the story which he is writing.

Professor: Yes.

Student: So, and given the fact that the presence makes itself manifest after this event, where the emotion is running high, it makes me think that the ghost is not a cold one as we expect it to be and, and the ghost itself is setting up all these things in a time when the emotions are running high. So, the emotional content I think...

Professor: Okay. I like that idea that he is kind of emotionally charged. He is very absorbed in his writing. So that could lead some to interpret, saying that perhaps you know, the ghost itself could be a figment of his imagination. He could be hallucinating, whatever, that kind of track is there in the story. Is he kind of imagining things? If you go back to the earlier reference of that blue light or whatever light blue, red or yellow he says, just my imagination. 'I told myself, I can't swear that I saw the light. So how could one think one sees without actually seeing?' So he is a bit confused as to whether he actually saw the light or not. So that track is there, which we can lay aside for one second.

We will come back to the other section, which is that the house has a narrative function to perform. It plays the role of a character, it is kind of pushing the story into a crisis so that that crisis could be resolved. The house does not have electricity. So that fact is contributing to this crisis and the fact that he is out of kerosene and then he has to go out and things happen. So the house becomes a character, that is evident here. The other interesting point here is that his friends, the clerks in the nearby building, they ask him when he goes to them for kerosene. He says, 'Couldn't you have asked your girlfriend to get you kerosene?'

So rumour has got about. There is talk about this writer and the female ghost and they have fun at his expense. What is interesting is that that romantic relationship is being established here, between the two of them. So my question is, is that the only kind of relationship a man and a woman can have? This question may not be appropriate given the time period of the story, this is 1950s India, camaraderie between the sexes is not encouraged, and it is frowned upon.

So the only possible relationship could be an ideal romance where the male figure invites the female to participate in intellectual, in aesthetic pursuits such as reading and writing and talking about it and listening to music. So we can ask all these questions to get a sense of the past and the present. So that is one of the reasons for rereading literature. We can't just criticize the past and say, 'Oh, they were terribly conventional, traditional' and just brush them aside.

We should continue to kind of draw lessons from what has gone on before so that the present and the future is more rational and organized and equitable for the sexes. So that is one way to look at it. Can we have, and the other question, could not you have asked your girlfriend to get you kerosene? That is the job of the female, right, to kind of run around, go on errands, sort things in the household, make sure the household fires lit, make sure the light is burning for the husband so that he can get his work done and all these things. So that is also the subtext in that question that has been posed to him.

Can I have two more people to complete?

Student: "As one of them was pouring kerosene into the bottle, it began to pour outside I said, give me an umbrella also. So they said one, there is not even a quarter one. Let us play cards for a while, you can go when the rain lets up. So we played cards. My partner and I did three

rounds of Salaam, mostly because my mind was on my story, and I was distracted while playing.

The rain stopped at about 1. I got up and picked up the torch and kerosene bottle. By now, my friends were also ready to sleep. After I went down to the street, they switched off their light. There was neither movement, nor light in the street as I walked back home. When I took the turning towards my house, the world lay immersed in mist and hazy moonlight. I did not remember what thoughts ran through my mind then. Perhaps I was not thinking at all. I continued walking along the dark road, empty and silent, flashing my torch. No living thing stirred anywhere. I reached my house, opened the gate, shut it and then opened the front door. I entered the house and latched the door from inside. I had no cause to think that anything unusual would have happened upstairs but something had. For no reason whatever, a vast sorrow abruptly filled my heart and I felt like crying.

I can laugh easily, but never shed a tear. Tears just do not come to me. When sorrow overwhelms me a divine exaltation takes hold of me, as it did now- a great compassion. In that state of mind, I climbed the stairs. And what I saw when I arrived on the upper floor was extraordinary. No, it was miraculous.

When I locked my room and left, you remember, there was no oil left in the lamp. The flame had gone out, and I had withdrawn the wick into the base of the lamp. Darkness had filled the room. Later, when while I was out, it had rained and some hours had passed. Now I saw the light shining clear through the chink below my door. Well, my eyes saw the light but my mind did not yet register or believe what I saw. Out of my sheer habit, I took out my key and flashed the torch light on the lock.

The lock shone like silver. Why, It seemed to smile. I opened the door and went in and now what I saw before me, struck me, filled me with full force. An indescribable sensation seared through every atom of my being. No, I did not quake with fright. Rather, as I stood transfixed, my mind was flooded by a tide of tenderness. Blue light. Light fills the whole room, drenched in ethereal blue light. That light came from the lamp in which a blue flame blazed. Who had lit this blue light in Bhargavi Nilayam?

Professor: Okay, thank you. I just want to pick up on one idea before I let Sanchar offer his comments on the point that Ananthajith was earlier making that this guy is kind of you know in an intense state of feelings, because he is writing that story, because that is referenced once

again in this section, where the writer says mostly because my mind was on my story, I was distracted while playing.

So the story is kind of preying on his mind. So what is the story that he is writing? So that also comes up to our mind, that question, is it a gothic story, is it a supernatural story? We don't know. Okay, so that is a very interesting point. And the fact that he also wants to write the life story of Bhargavi. So stories do have a kind of a very strong presence in this particular short story.

Student: It is like, it is almost at the end of the story. So the climax is already there. What I want to comment on this one is the interesting fact about the blue light. So throughout the entire narrative of the story, there has been, as somebody pointed out, a monologue. So there had not been any explicit reply or answer on the part of Bhargavi. So this ending was more like, kind of a reply from Bhargavi and the blue thing, the blue light, it is like blue always symbolizes something about melancholy.

I mean, we even have the idiom called 'in the blues' means melancholy. So I think that Bhargavi, the presence of the ghost in this story is very much strikingly different from all other presence of the ghosts in popular ghost stories. I mean, we get something eerie, we get something more, if I say the term harmful or something like that, which basically is horrific or something, but here, it is not like that.

It is more like a presence which culminates in a kind of realization on the part of the author. He feels a sad stream of consciousness inside him. And he has a surge of emotions going inside like nostalgia, which is actually shown by the songs which have been played. So I think that the narrator has given a very proper conclusion which is appropriate to the way the story has been narrated, in terms of the songs, the emotions which the songs are creating. And the blue light, I suppose that it has added to both the metaphoric and the symbolic aspects of the story.

Professor: A benediction.

Student: Yes, like...

Professor: In the sense that she, she is grateful to this writer for inviting her in, for kind of warming up to her and making her participatory in that space of Bhargavi Nilayam. And you are quite right, we do not have the eeriness, we do not have the horror, we do not have the

ghastliness that we see in popular culture as well as in other literary forms. She is disembodied, a point which I made earlier too. We do not have her as a kind of a physical figure and she at the end of it becomes a light. That is her answer as well as her figure. She becomes a pure light, melancholic, peaceful, benign presence and she becomes the answer to that monologue that he has been, you know, kept on going in this house. So yeah, very peaceful, non-threatening aspects are offered to this female in this particular story, quite right.

But my question is about the supernatural. If you go back to that passage, ‘when I lock my room and left, you remember,’ he is addressing the reader, we need to remember that this is a first person narrative and at points in the story, he kind of talks to the reader. He invites the reader in, and what would be the impact of that on a reader, he feels closer or she feels closer to the narrator and more likely to buy his reading of the environment around him in a way.

So, and when he makes all these comments right ‘when I locked the room and left you remember, there was no oil left in the lamp, blah, blah, blah, we do remember, right? We are also intensely involved in the story. And if you go back to the earlier section where the light goes out, it has been very slowly narrated— ‘I raised the wick a little, I continued writing after a while, the light dimmed again. Again, I raised the wick.’

So we are very, very clear about the fact that the room was in total darkness. We know. And why is he insistent on reminding us again about the fact that there was no light. The reason could only be this— he wants us to know, he wants us to believe, he wants us to buy this notion that the supernatural is very much present. There is a blue light, and the blue light is suffusing.

So my question is, what is the meaning of this very insistent affirmation of the supernatural? What are the implications of affirming the supernatural? If you look at the history of Gothic stuff, there are two strands - one is that the supernatural is rejected by rational explanations. The other is that there is an affirmation of the supernatural and these are the two strands. So when you affirm the supernatural, what do you do? What do you do to the mind of the reader? What is the meaning that you kind of convey through the story? So that is one question that we can probe into. I want to leave that question with you, and leave you to seek the answers to that question. Yeah. So what is the impact of affirming the supernatural? This is 1950s India. India is newly-won, the independence, this is a new nation trying to come to grips with its independence and we have a supernatural story where a female ghost’s presence is affirmed. So I want you to think about this question.

Let's go back to that earlier line, 'out of sheer habit, I took out my key, flashed the torch light on the lock, the lock shone like silver.' It's a beautiful image, the lock shone like silver. Why? It seemed to smile. We have a personification. The human attribute of a smile, once again going back to your point about the peaceful aura around that ghost, There is no ghastliness. There is only benign presence of Bhargavi through this kind of light.

And the final question who had lit this blue light in Bhargavi? It is totally a superfluous question, we all know. So what is the point of the question? Once again to reinforce the fact for the reader that this blue light is the light of Bhargavi. So, these are the two things that immediately comes to my mind. Mrithula, would you like to add to the set of responses or any comments do you have to offer on this section?

Student: Ma'am, he was talking about his state of mind when he was young, when he came to that place that he is somebody who doesn't cry, but he sheds a tear. But he does not know whether he is happy or whether he is sad. Probably he sheds a tear mainly because throughout the story, we have understood that he is kind of in a romantic relationship with this ghost and he wants affirmation from the ghost that 'yes, I am here I, I understand, I can hear whatever you are talking to me, I can hear you, I am listening to you.'

There was not much response from the side of the ghost. So when he sees the blue light, it is kind of a valediction from the ghost, stating that 'I have listened to all your conversations, I have thoroughly enjoyed your company' and maybe it is also we can interpret in a way that she is accepting his love towards her. And also 'the lock shone like silver. Why, it seemed to smile.' It is like, before you confess to somebody, you talk with your friends and all, about your, when you talk to your friends about your relationship. Before you confess to somebody, they have this tendency to pull your legs and all. So I just feel that this lock is like probably all the things that are present in the house are like his friends. And it is like, this lock is giving him a positive nod saying that okay, she is going to confess love. I do not know.

Professor: Okay, yeah, just a comment. Yeah. They are kind of projecting a lot of our contemporary notions of romance onto this story. But you have a point in the sense that the lock is personified. He is projecting his emotions onto the lock and the question would be, the inevitable question would be, is he kind of imagining the blue light itself? The entire suffusion of light, is it a figment of his imagination? So that question would also inevitably arise.

But the point again is that the house does play a role in the complication and the resolution of this particular story. But to go back to that earlier section that you pointed out, it kind of, it fits in with a puzzle, in a sense. 'For no reason whatever, a vast sorrow abruptly filled my heart.' Why is he sorrowful? Why is he sorrowful? I felt like crying. Why?

'I can laugh easily but never shed a tear. Tears just do not come to me.' What has gone on before this point to make him this melancholic. He has been writing. That is an intense piece of writing. He goes to meet his friends, plays cards, he is distracted, he is coming back home, he is very emotional. The point is, he does not give you a straight answer. This narrator doesn't give you a straight answer throughout the story.

If you go back to the earlier reference about his travels to many lands, he just says many lands, he does not give you a set of names of places. And he says that I do not know the meaning of these travels. And once again, there is no specific meaning given to us as readers. There is a lot of ambiguities and lack of specificities and that tells you, that puts you in a very, very difficult position to assess the kind of character this man is.

But, but if you come to the closing section of the story, he says, rather, as I stood transfixed, my mind was flooded by a tide of tenderness, romantic tenderness, most safely to assume, a tide of tenderness towards Bhargavi the ghost is inevitability the response because she is kind of giving him thanks by providing him light to continue his writing. So once again, we have a female who is kind of burning herself out, who is kind of becoming the lamp itself to guide the male figure.

She has completely lost her figure, persona, life itself and becomes just an essence, a peaceful essence so that this man can write. So that is always there as one of the interpretations to this story.

I have a few other questions. So if one of you can just come and read the questions, you can think about it in your own time and find answers to it. Shweta, would you like to come here please?

Yeah, we need to think about the relationship between the two figures, the two central characters - one is very much present, the other is kind of a disembodied, virtual presence.

Student: Okay. What is the function of romance in the blue light?

Professor: What kind of a romance is there in the story? We need to explore the nature of the romance. Is there a real romance? Was he kind of bluffing until that last moment in the story when there is a kind of a flood of tenderness in him? Is that the real point in the story when he is really affected by Bhargavi and we can kind of argue that all along, he has been kind of playing around with that ghost?

Student: And why does he forget to keep up the conversation with Bhargavi after a while?

Professor: Yeah, this is one of the questions that we did answer. You can also seek other answers to this question. And it could also lead you to think about the machinations of this narrator and, and argue that he is being very clever. He is using the romantic notions as a ploy to kind of keep himself safe in this house.

Student: What is the role of stories in the blue light? Or more specifically, what is the function of the story of Bhargavi in the blue light?

Professor: Yeah, there are two kind of related questions here. The function of stories, the story about Bhargavi, the kind of things that she does to tenants, that story is there. You know the story of her rejected love and suicide, the you know all these stories, what are the function of these stories in this particular story of the blue light? And we need to remember that the blue light is itself a story of Bhargavi. He is writing in the present about a past. So she has been transformed into a saleable story which is kind of published and consumed by the reader. So she is packaged textually for consumption, and he does that. So we need to remember that textual life of Bhargavi too.

Student: What is the significance of the title, 'The Blue Light'?

Professor: Yeah, blue light. We did address this issue once again. The blue light referring to Bhargavi as a kind of an essence, a kind of a harmless essence, for the benefit of the male figure. Other interpretations are allowed. You can offer your thoughts on this title as well.

Student: What is the significance of the title of the central setting Bhargavi Nilayam?

Student: Yeah, Bhargavi Nilayam. It is not blue light; the house is not called blue light. It is called Bhargavi Nilayam. So the house belongs to her. But if you look at the story closely, at points, he would say, my house, I am going back to my house. And at some other point he would say, it is our house, he shares the house with her. So who owns this house at the end of

the day, who has a greater right to it? Or what is the impact of ownership? So all these questions can be responded to in relation to Bhargavi Nilayam.

Student: How do we approach the affirmation of the supernatural in the story?

Professor: Yeah, this is the big question that I want you to think deeply about. What are the impact of believing in the supernatural for us, both in the past and in the present? What kind of impact it could have had on the readers of the past? They could have been you know confirmed in their beliefs of the spirit world. If they believe in the spirit world, what are the consequences or the ramifications?

What are the ramifications of believing in the spirit world today, yesterday, in the past? If you believe in the spirit world, would you also believe in the rationality of suicide, in the rationality of killing for love, killing yourself for love? Would you believe in the rationality of the primacy of the male? So all these questions are interconnected in your response to the question of the affirmation of the supernatural in the story.

Student: The narrator addresses the reader every now and then. What is the effect of that on the reader? Remember that the story is in a first person narrative.

Professor: Yeah, please do pay attention to the first person narrative because it is very, very useful in detective fiction, in fiction of horror and terror. It is a useful device employed by writers and again the intimacy that he kind of forms or forges with the reader at the expense of Bhargavi is an interesting trajectory to explore.

Student: What is the impact of his light-hearted tone on Bhargavi and on the readers?

Professor: Yeah, think about the light hearted nature of the narrator. He is very positive. He is cheerful, at least towards Bhargavi. What does the role of cheer and light heartiness play in the weaving of romance? If for some reason, I am reminded of Mansfield park, and Henry Crawford, I think, says that 'I want to master her smiles.' Smiling and romance, smiling and ownership is kind of connected, you know, if you command her smile you command her loyalty and romance. So all these ideas are floating about in literature. So I want you to take it very, very logically and in a research oriented measure to understand the nature of light heartiness and positivism in the forging of successful romances. If you want to do a bit of research along these lines, you can do that.

Student: Is the narrator scheming to keep possession of the house? Or should we consider his eccentric behaviour as leading to an extraordinary romance, friendship that crosses the borders of the living world?

Professor: Yeah, the first part is a cynical question. Is he trying to keep the house? Is he trying to kind of stay in the house? Is he using romance as a kind of fraud to win the ghost over? So that is a cynical question. Of course, you can try to answer that cynicism, with a lot of faith in romance and friendship that crosses the borders of the living and the dead. So you can argue for both viewpoints rationally and with textual evidence and cultural evidence from 1950s Kerala.

So thank you for your attention and patience during the session. It was a pleasure to have your thoughts and comments and participation on 'The Blue Light'. Thank you.