

**Short Fiction in Indian Literature**  
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**Lecture-1**


**Plotting the Story world of "In the Flood by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai**

Hi everyone welcome to this first lecture on plotting the story world of in the flood by Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai I would like to begin by offering a very brief introduction about the author Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai.

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Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (1912-1999)

- ◆ Born in Thakazhi, Kuttanad, Kerala
- ◆ 40 novels and more than 600 short stories.
- ◆ *Thottiyude Makan (Scavenger's Son)* ; *Chemmeen (Shrimp)*;  
*Kayar (Coir)*



He was born in Thakazhi Kuttanad, Kerala and he firmly known as Thakazhi after the place of his birth. He wrote about 40 novels and more than 600 short stories in the Malayalam language, some of his most famous fiction are Thottiyude Makan Chmmeen and Kayat.

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## Thakazhi Sivasankara Pillai (1912-1999)

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*Kayar* (Coir)

The major concern in most of Thakazhi's writing is for the poor the lower cast members and the downtrodden in society at large, he is in fact known as the friend of the oppressed, before I dwell deeper into the story of in the flood I would like to talk initially about what exactly is a story and what exactly is a plot.

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## Introduction: the story and the plot

What is a story?

What is a plot?

What is a story a story.

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## Story

- ◇ A story is a set of events.

A story is a set of events.

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## Manfred Jahn on the story

- ◇ “A **sequence of events and actions** involving **characters**.”
- ◇ 'Events' generally include natural and nonnatural happenings like floods or car accidents;
- ◇ 'action' more specifically refers to willful acts by characters.”

According to Manfred Jahn a story is a sequence of events and actions involving characters, so for him events generally include both natural and unnatural happening like flood or car accidents and actions more specifically refers to wilful acts by characters, wilful here referring to deliberate actions.

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## “In the Flood”

◇ A dog that is trapped in a flood dies.

So what is the story of in the flood, this is a story about a dog that is trapped in a flood and it die, so this is the story, what exactly is a plot.

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## What is a Plot?

◇ “a sense making operation”

Peter Brook, *Reading for the Plot*:

Text, Life

A plot is a sense making operation if we take Peter Brook's definition of a plot, he says in his book reading for the plot, ploy is about making sense of a text and thereby making sense of life itself.

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## Plot

- ◆ A **plot** refers to the sequence of events, with their causes and effects emphasized.
- ◆ E.M. Forster: "The King died and the Queen died" is a story (i.e., a sequence of events), "The King died, and then the Queen died of grief" is a plot.

Plot refers to the sequence of events would it causes and effect emphasized. E.M. Forster tells us that for example if the king died and the queen died it is just to story, it just talks about the sequence of events, the king dying and the queen dying, how if we read something like if the king died and then the queen died of grief then that is a plot because causation is referred to there.

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## E.M.Forster, Plotting

- ◆ Consists "in the creation
- ◆ (and also the suspenseful suppression)
- ◆ of causal connections between the individual events..."

Therefore in other words for E. M Forster plotting consist in the creation and also the suppression suspenseful suppression of causal connection between individual events. Therefore if we understand these meanings of plot and apply them to in the flood what exactly is a plot there.

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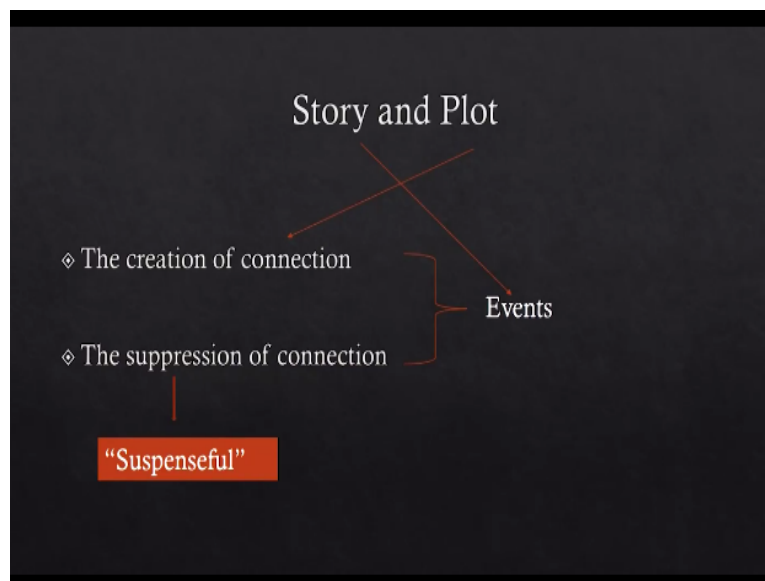
## Plot of "In the Flood"

A dog dies in a flood because it is not rescued.

A dog dies because humans refuse to rescue it.

We could say the plot of in the flood is about a dog dying in a floods because it is not recued or we can say that a dog dies because human beings refused to rescue it. So these are the possible interpretations of the plot of in the flood. Now let us look at story and the plot together.

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Both story and the plot involve events, however plot talks about the creation of connection or the suppression of connections of events and we talk about suppression of connection there is this associated ideas suspense involved in it too. Now I would like to take a look at another deer is called Claude Bremond on plotting.

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## Claude Bremond on Plotting

◇ Alternatives and Possibilities

He talks about alternative and possibilities and interesting idea in terms of mapping the plot of a story on narrative. So Claude Bremond talks about virtual courses of events which may be desired or striven for by characters but which never actually occur in the storyworld.

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## Claude Bremond

◇ “virtual courses of events which may be desired or striven for by characters, but which may never actually occur in the storyworld.

So the characters in the story hope for certain courses of events which may not be realised in the actual narrative, so he talks about a network at three-phased triadic branching model where there is an initial situation a starting point of premise.

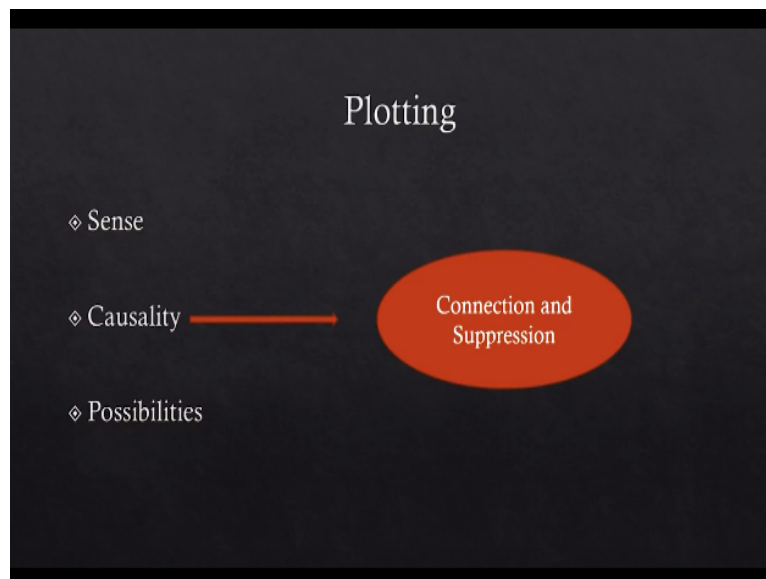
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## Claude Bremond on Plotting

- ◇ network of possibilities: a three-phased (triadic) branching model ...
- ◇ an initial situation
- ◇ and both the actualisation and non-actualisation of the next stage in the narrative.”

And then we have both actualization the realisation or the known actualization of the next stage in the narrative. So we have an initial state of affairs and then we have a desired outcome and then we have an outcome that is desired but not realised. Now if we want make sense this plotting it can be done in 3 ways, one it is about making sense that is it is about making meaning.

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The other is about causality in the events, so causality as I said is a bad connection and suppression of connections among the events and the final things that we need to think about in terms of plotting is possibility. So what are the possibilities that the cactus aspire for and which of them are realize and which of them are not realised. Now if we look at in a if we look at the story of in the flood let us see what happens.

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## Story of “In the Flood”

- ◇ Chennan and his family are trapped in a flood.
- ◇ They escape in a boat.
- ◇ His dog is apparently left behind.
- ◇ The dog dies.

Chennan and his family are trapped in a flood and then they escape in a boat but his dog is left behind and then he dies. So this in short is the story. So how exactly is this story set up in the narrative.

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## In the Flood

- ◇ How exactly is the story set?
- ◇ “Chennan, the pariah, had been standing in water an entire night and a day. It had been three days since his master had escaped to safety.”

The narrative says Chennan the pariah had been standing in water an entire night and a day, it has been raining for 3 days, it has been 3 days since its master had escaped to safety. So this is the initial premise of the story and how exactly does he survive in the flood this is how he does.

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## “In the Flood”

- ◇ How exactly does he survive in a flooded home?
- ◇ “Chennan did not own a row boat so inside his hut he had built an elevated platform out of coconut fronds and twigs that jutted above the level of the floodwaters.”

He does not own a row boat, so what he does is inside his hut he had built an elevated platform out of coconut fronds and twigs that jutted above the level of the floodwaters. So he builds a raised platform and he stays there on it in order to avoid the waters, in the flood we see the Chennan has these dependent.

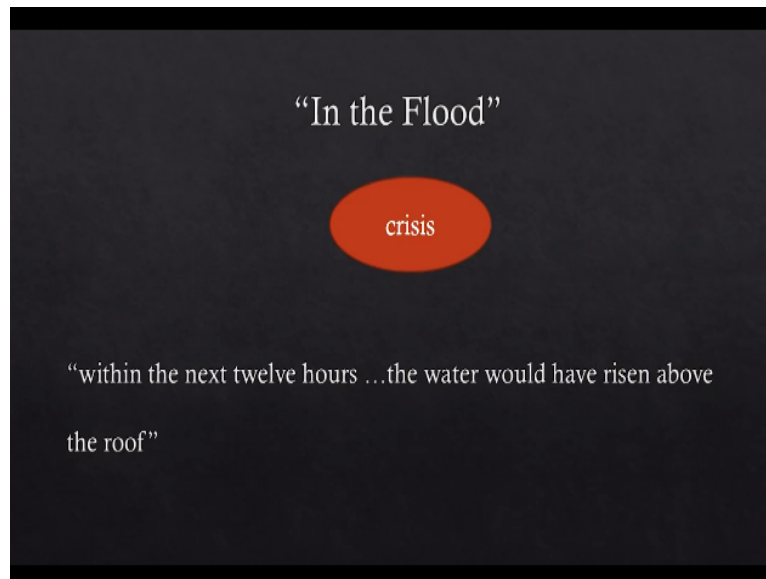
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## “In the Flood”

- ◇ Chennan's dependents included a pregnant wife, four kids, a cat and a dog.

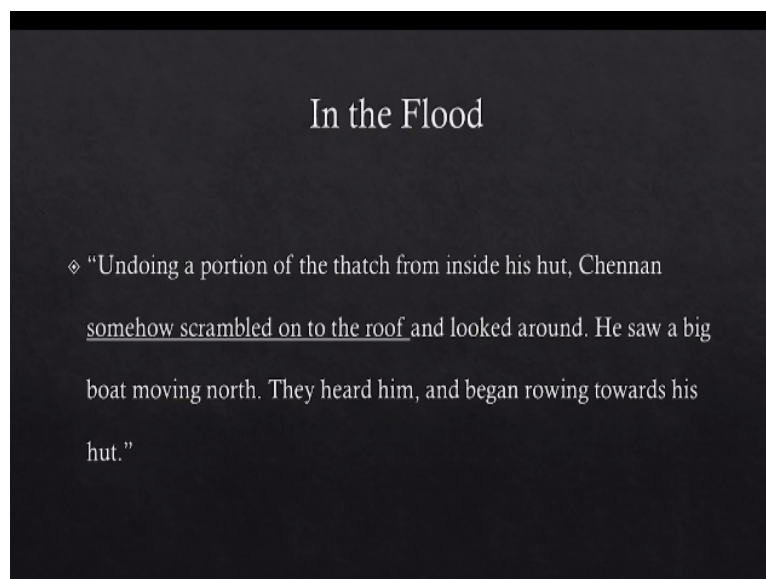
So his dependence include a pregnant wife, 4 kids, a cat and a dog. So these are the characters in the story at the beginning and what exactly is the crisis in the story.

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The crisis is that within the next 12 hours the water would have listened about the roof, how does Chennan avoid this crisis is mentioned in the narrative. So what exactly he does is that he undrawn, he removes a portion of the cat from inside his hut.

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And he scrambled onto the roof and he looks around, he sees a big boat moving not he cries and then they hear him and they began to row towards his hut and they rescue him and his dependence. So this situation of Chennan being on a platform about the flood waters is a precarious situation and if we apply Bremond's possibilities to this situation what we get is this.

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## Bremond's Possibilities

- ◊ In his precarious situation, which is the initial state of affairs, Chennan longs for an escape and is granted that. He gets away to safety with his family.

Chennan desires escape and he is granted that, so he gets over right to safety with his family. So the possibility the alternator is realised or actualized for Chennan in the flood.

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## "In the Flood"

◊ Possibility, Alternative → Actualised

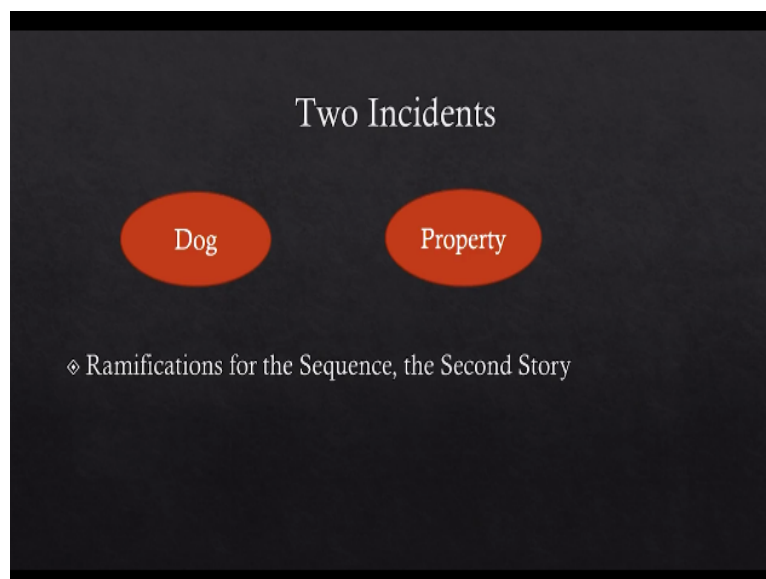
I would call this as the first story written in the flood.

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The first story is Chennan's story and it has a Happy Ending, Chennan escapes and his dependence too at least most of the dependents too, now there are 2 incidents from the first story which are kind of left behind for the second story to pick up and move forward.

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So let us look at the 2 things that are left behind and these 2 things have ramifications for the sequence of the second story written in the flood. So these 2 are the dog and property which are left behind by Chennan. So if we go back to first story Chennan does not immediately leave his hut as soon as the what is begin to rise because if they left the hut the 5 banana trees that were heavy with fruit and his hayrick would be stolen.

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## “In the Flood”

### Aspect 1:

- ◆ “if they left the hut, his five banana trees that were heavy with fruit and his hayrick would be stolen”

Hayrick means hay dark, so he stays behind to look after his property and the second aspect that is very interesting for us to kind of think about deeply is this.

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## “In the Flood”

### ◆ Aspect 2:

- ◆ “No one took notice of the dog who was still sniffing around in the western end of the hut.”

No one took notice of the dog who was still sniffing around in the western end of the hut. So the dog is at the western end of the roof top of the hut while Chennan and his family escape via a boat. Now I am going to talk about the second story, the first stories I said was Chennan story and the second story is his dog story.

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## The Second Story

- ◇ Chennan's dog's story.
- ◇ Beginning
- ◇ Crisis
- ◇ Resolution?

And this dog story also has a beginning of crisis and a desire for resolution and the big question is his desire result or realised. So this is how the second story begins.

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## In the Flood

- ◇ “When the dog eventually returned to the spot on the roof from which the family had made its escape, the boat was far away. The animal began to run around frantically on the roof, sniffing here and there, whining all the while.”

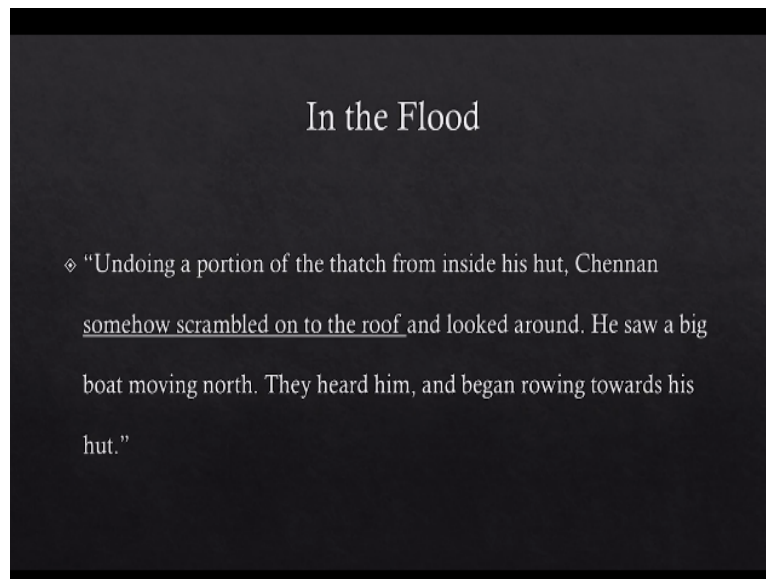


When the dog eventually returned to the spot on the roof from which the family had made it escape the boat was far away, the animal begin to run around frantically on the roof, sniffing here and there, whining all the while. So the dog does not realise that the family is making it scared away and when it comes back to that spot from which they have left it kind of runs around almost panicking and it starts to cry or whelm.

If you look at this phrase begin to run around frantically it somehow resembles tenants attitude when he remove the touch from inside his hut and then he gets on to the top of the

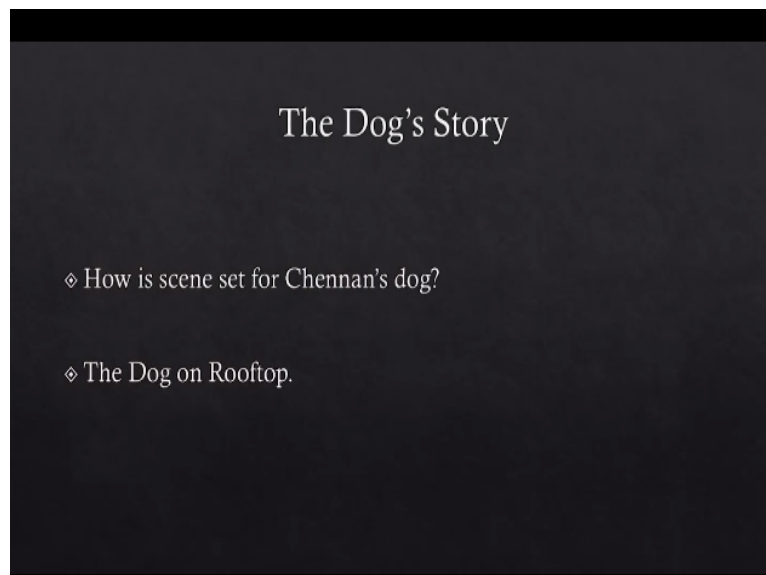
roof to know rescue. So let us go back to that slide where Chennan ask scrabbles just as his dog kind of frantically looks around.

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So this action scene to mirror of parallel one another something that has very symbolic meaning and which we will come back to in latest session. Now let us took how this story is set for Chennan's dog.

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So this dog is on a rooftop.

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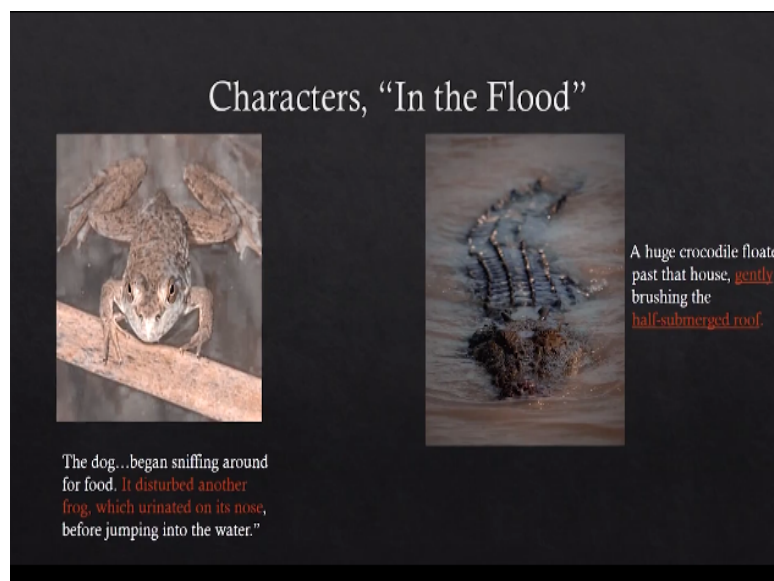


## Sequence of Events

- ◇ Who/what appears?
- ◇ What do they do?
- ◇ What are their significance/role?

And we need to think about the sequence of events that is set up for this particular story, who or what appears in Chennan's dog's story, what do they do and what is the significance or role in this story. Now these are the characters that appear in Chennan's dog's story .

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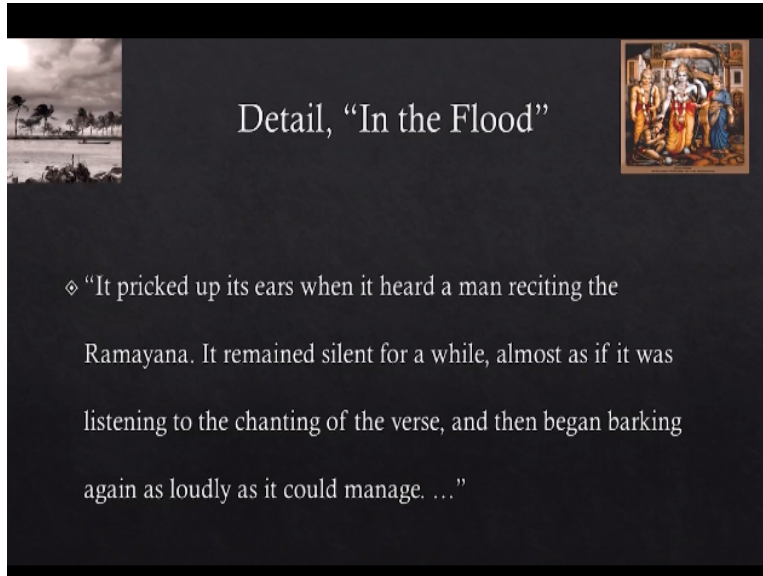


The first character that appears is a set of frogs, so when the dog tries to sniff around a long the rooftop it disturbs on some frog and one of them before it jumps or leaps into the water urinate on the face of the dog and this as symbolic significance which we will come back to again later in evaluation of the story. The other actor that follows the frog is a huge crocodile that floats past the house gently brushing the half submerge roof.

At the word gently or the ideal gently is also very interesting in the context of a crocodile that is a very very insidious creature and we are also constantly reminded that the dog is in

precarious situation and the phrase half submerge roof is an indication of that. Now the other very interesting detail that follow these set of characters is the reference to the Ramayana.

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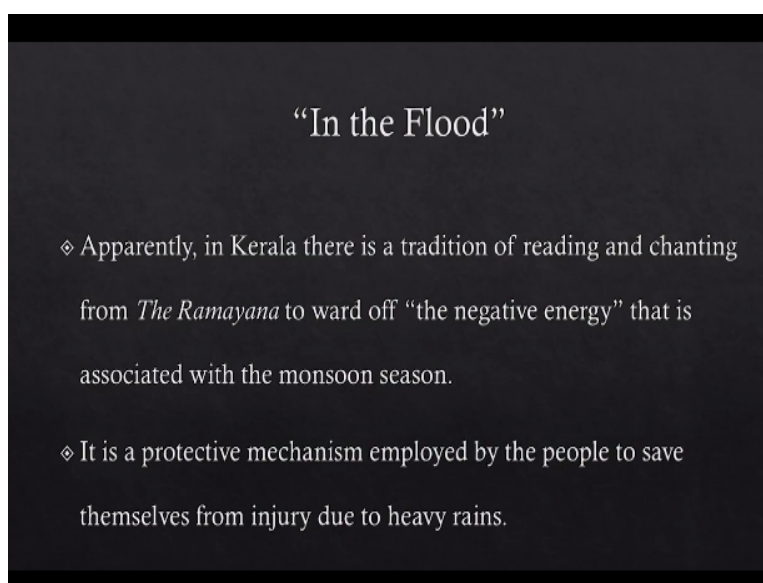
Detail, "In the Flood"

◇ "It pricked up its ears when it heard a man reciting the Ramayana. It remained silent for a while, almost as if it was listening to the chanting of the verse, and then began barking again as loudly as it could manage. ..."

And in this atmosphere when there is rain when does flood water that is affecting the entire village we have someone reciting verses from the Ramayana and the dog listens to this recitation. The narrator says that the dog pricked up its ears when heard a man reciting the Ramayana. It remains silent for a while almost as if it was listening to the chanting of the world and then began working again as loudly as it could manage.

So the dog listen to the recitation and it barks again and implication could be that is kind of seeking help perhaps to this person who is chanting the word and let me give you a little bit of the context to this recitation which is apparently in Kerala.

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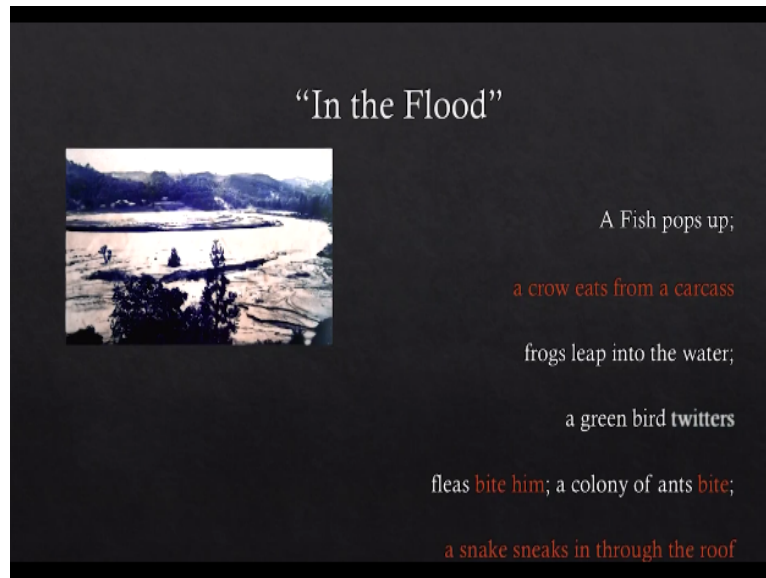
"In the Flood"

◇ Apparently, in Kerala there is a tradition of reading and chanting from *The Ramayana* to ward off "the negative energy" that is associated with the monsoon season.

◇ It is a protective mechanism employed by the people to save themselves from injury due to heavy rains.

There is a tradition of reading and chanting from the Ramayana to wards of what they call the negative energy that is associated with the monsoon season. So apparently this recitation or singing of the word from the Ramayana is a protective mechanism kind of utilized or implied by the people to save themselves from injury due to heavy rains. Now followed by the teacher or another set of incidence of events in the story that the writer stitches in the story of Chennan's dog.

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Let us see what is the set of events we have a fish popping up out of the water and a we have a crow eating from hackers which Chennan's dog notices or observe and he vines at that action because we can understand the dog is terribly hungry and it wants to have its share of the characters too but and it that something that it does not have at this particular point of time and then we have frogs again leaping into the water, we have a green bird twittering in this environment.

And then we have references to fleas on the dog's body that bite him and later we have a colony of ants that also bite him when this dog disturbs their nest and finally we have another very interesting event where a snake kind of sneaks into the roof of Chennan's huts, these instance also very very symbolic which we need to unpack to drive their largest significance.

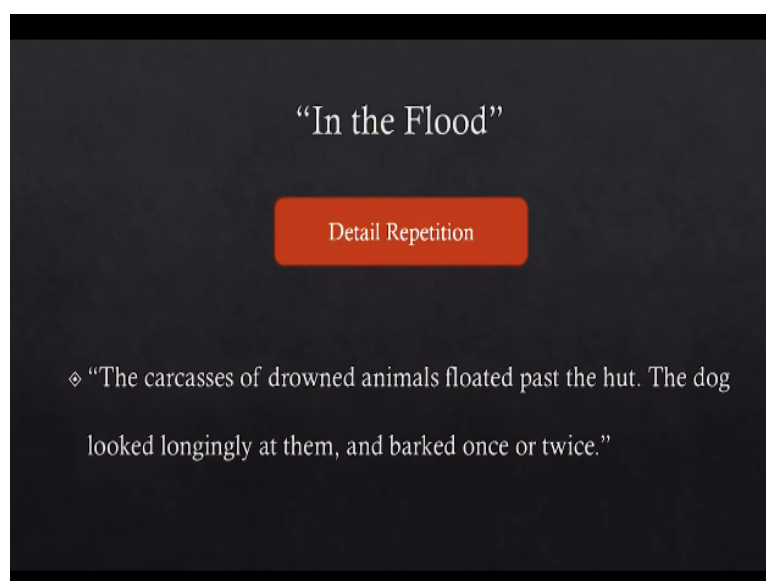
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Now what exactly are the meanings are embedded in the set of events some of the meanings are that life itself is indifferent and life goes on despite it being a tragedy or a crisis too many others for dog this is a crisis situation but for the green bird that twitter this is nothing but as little bit may be different, but it is not affected by it and life is hard. See for example we have a dead body up carcasses floating on the water that strategy for the creature that had left.

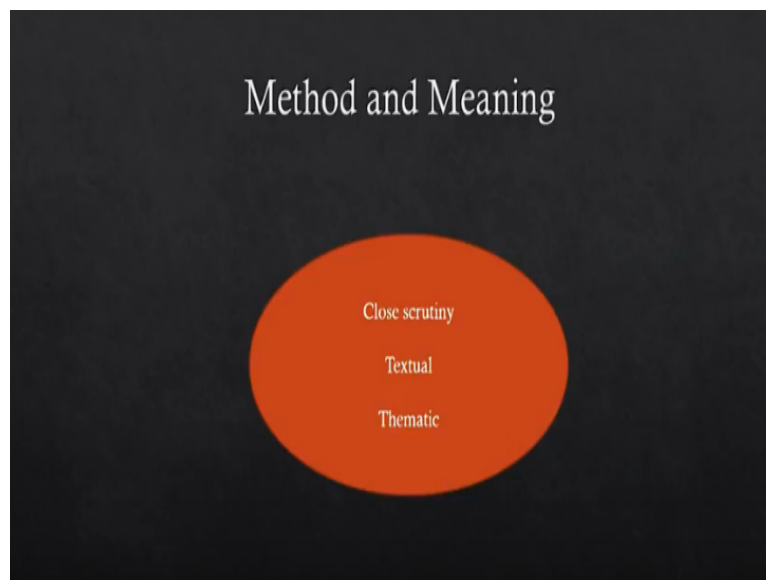
But then that carcasses again comes food for the crow and life is about survival life is about are the features sticking on to the life sustaining themselves one way or the other despite being threatened by factors from the environment. Now we need to look closely at details that are constantly repeated.

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And one of the details that is repeated is the idea of carcasses are floating in the water, the narrator says that the carcasses of drowned animals floated past the hut, the dog looked longingly at them and barked once or twice and we need to again remember that the dog is starving and wants to eat from carcasses something that it eventually does towards the finale of the story with fatal consequences.

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Now in terms of looking at the story the method that I would advise is a the phase of close reading or a close scrutiny of the text and this kind not only provide us with textual interpretation but it will also offer the students thematic meaning in terms of the larger structure of the story in question, thank you.