

THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE / PARASH PATHAR (1958)

Satyajit Ray

(Bengali language)

OVERVIEW

Auteur and the film After the international success of *The Apu Trilogy*, Satyajit Ray (1921—1992) turned his attention to an emerging genre in Bengali cinema— that of character and situational comedy in a contemporary urban setting. After *Aparajito*, the second film of *The Apu Trilogy*, lost money at the Indian box office but paradoxically gained him acclaim as an international filmmaker, Ray realized “a Bengali film-maker did not have to depend on the home market alone”. However, he chose for his subject a story that is perhaps too inflected by the local, as against the universality of his other, more famous films. According to the critic Marie Seton, *Parash Pathar* was underappreciated and this fanciful/ ironic comedy has not been studied as thoroughly as his other films. This is not at all surprising, given Bengali intelligentsia's nose-thumbing at the more ‘popular’ genres, including fantasy and comedy. And much of the comedy, as other scholars have commented, are lost on international audiences.

Background Most of Ray's films are adaptations of existing literary works and this is no exception; the film is based on a short story of the same name by “Parasuram” Rajsekhar Basu. Parasuram's biting satire, wit, irony and exaggeration for comedic effect are, however, much tamed in the film. In the short story, Paresh is a moderately well-to-do lawyer, while in the film he is a bank clerk facing layoff. In the story, he is much greedier and grows his gold factory to admiration, envy and finally threats from nations worldwide— from Churchill to Barnard Shaw, everyone had a comment. He drastically reduced the price of gold, causing worldwide inflation and rioting. His secretary, Priyatosh Henry Biswas, is also a more rounded character and details of his work ethic and romantic situation are more evident than in the film. The beginning and end plot points are however nearly identical.

The interested reader may peruse a translation at [parabaas.com](https://www.parabaas.com/translation/database/translations/stories/parashuram_philosophers.html)
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Casting Ray's selection of Parasuram's short story was guided by his choice of actor— Tulsi Chakravarty— already in his late fifties and one of the most underrated comedic talents of Bengali cinema. As critic Chidananda Dasgupta argues, Ray had noted his genius in utilizing his physical features— pot belly, bald head, bulging eyes and splayed gait— to the maximum comedic effect. He embodied the underpaid, overworked, harried and pitiable office clerk to the hilt. Aside from Chakravarty, the film employs a strong comedic ensemble cast, including Kali Bannerjee playing Priyatosh Henry Biswas and Jahar Roy in the role of Bhajahari (shortened to a nickname, Bhaja).

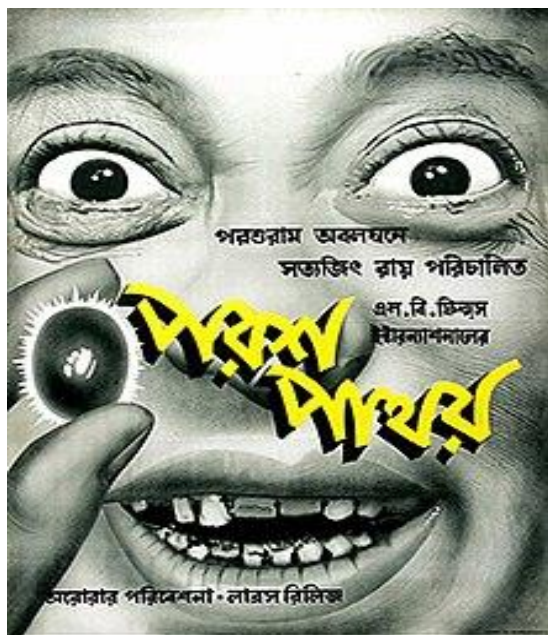
MAJOR CHARACTERS

Paresh Chandra Dutta	A harried clerk who finds the philosopher's stone
Giribala Dutt	Paresh's wife
Priyatosh Henry Biswas	Paresh's personal secretary

SYNOPSIS

Paresh Chandra Dutta, an aging clerk, is handed a termination notice from his bank job. On his way back home, he picks up an interesting marble, only later realizing that it is the fabled philosopher's stone. After selling some gold that he transformed by touching the stone to different objects, he quickly becomes rich. Ridden by guilt and anxiety over the miraculous gold, he does not procure many personal possessions beyond a house, car, jewelry for his wife, Giribala, and shares. Most of his money is spent on charitable causes. He hires a reliable personal secretary, Priyatosh Henry Biswas, who now manages his financial affairs. One day, Paresh is invited to a cocktail party at a Marwari Seth's house, where, socially awkward among upper-class guests and quickly

intoxicated, he reveals the stone's secret. Seth approaches him for the formula and he replies with a nonsense poem. In fear of retaliation, he then tries to flee with Giribala, leaving the stone with Priyatosh. The couple are brought in for questioning by the police. In the meanwhile, Priyatosh is rejected by his girlfriend over the uproar and swallows the stone in place of cyanide. As he digests it, all the transformed objects turn back to iron.



PLOT

Dalhousie square The film opens to a voice-over narrator, saying, “Dalhousie square...the nerve-center of Kolkata...Dalhousie square”, depicting a fast-forward view of a busy intersection. Men and woman are seen scurrying across the road, at times choking traffic, boarding buses and taxis.



POOR LIFE

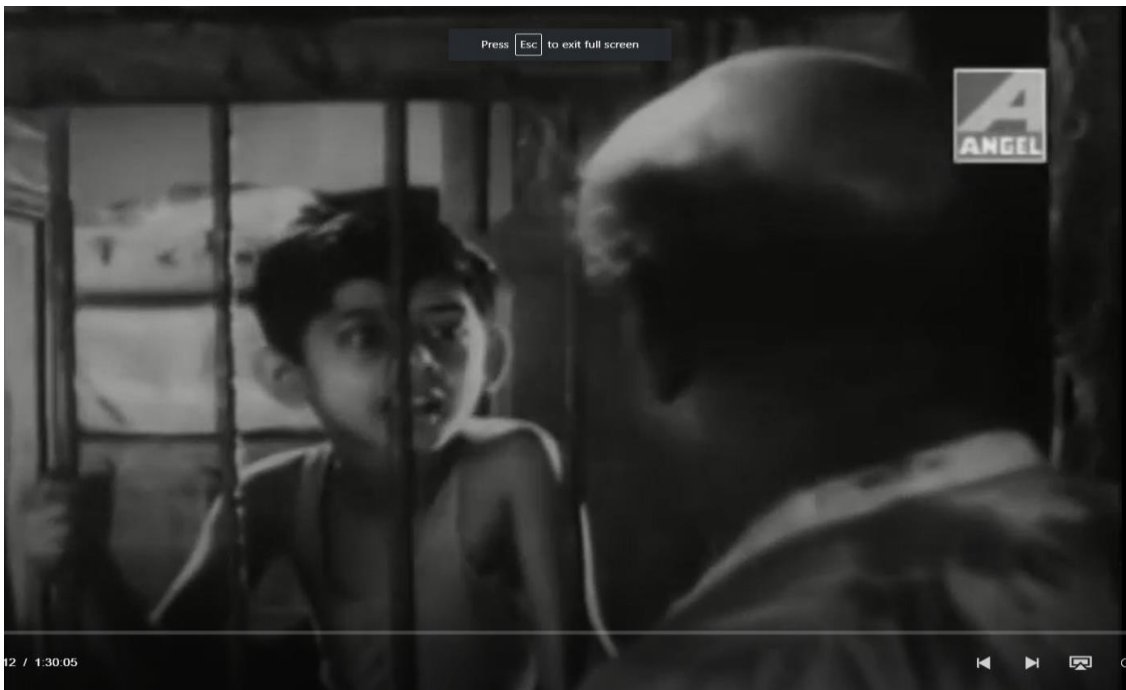
Paresh is fired The voice-over narrator introduces the main character, Paresh Dutta, an aging clerk at the end of his workday at an antiquated office building in Dalhousie. He is waiting for the elevator as a colleague joins him. Paresh complains that he has been handed a job termination notice at 53 years of age. Four men clad in western suits push them aside to ride down the elevator.



Rain and a stone In a long continuous shot taken from across the street, Paresh is seen walking briskly on a sidewalk, then stumbling and running, while looking at the sky and his watch and flailing his large black umbrella. It starts raining heavily. He finds some shelter in Curzon Park and uncomfortably dozes off. A small round stone falls in front of him.



A gift Paresh skips through a rain-drenched, narrow path. He stops at a window to speak to Poltu (a neighbor's son) and offers him an interesting gift in exchange for reciting a nonsense poem: 'A green and gold orang-outang/ Rocks and stones that jolt and jang/ trouble-shooters, blotted blobs/ city center vacant jobs.' He gives Poltu the stone, which looks like an interesting marble, saying it would make a great atom bomb for his war game.



Coming home Paresh is accosted by a shrill-voiced lady, his wife, Giribala, who wants to know why he was so late. He replies that he was tired after walking all the way as the trams weren't running and buses were too full. He enters his bedroom and recites the earlier poem with special emphasis on '*city center vacant jobs*', after which he starts laughing. Giribala enters with snacks, asks if he's gone senile and for news from the office. He lies about some meetings but does not mention that he has been handed a termination notice. Suddenly Poltu calls for him.



A miracle! Poltu shows him a toy soldier that had changed after touching the 'marble atom bomb', demonstrating again with another toy soldier. Paresh is astounded to see the toy turn to gold in front of his eyes. Poltu runs away across the street to his own house with the "magic stone", yelling, "I won't give it to you"! Paresh realizes it's the philosopher's stone.



Bribe He rushes to a nearby shop and buys handfuls of candies and marbles to bribe Poltu, who returns the stone to him.



Gold!! Excited but afraid to be seen by anyone, Paresh brings the stone close to different small objects and then hides it in his pocket in a crazy dance-like movement. The household servant, Bhaja, comes to fumigate the room with a local mixture of burning coconut fibers and aromatic salts. Paresh shuts the door and touches small things on his desk with the rock. The things all turn to gold. He starts laughing manically, shouting "Gold! Gold!" But laughs soon turn to sobs as he collapses on the floor. Giribala enters, concerned, but he keeps crying. Bhaja enters with a cup of tea and also starts crying.



RICH LIFE

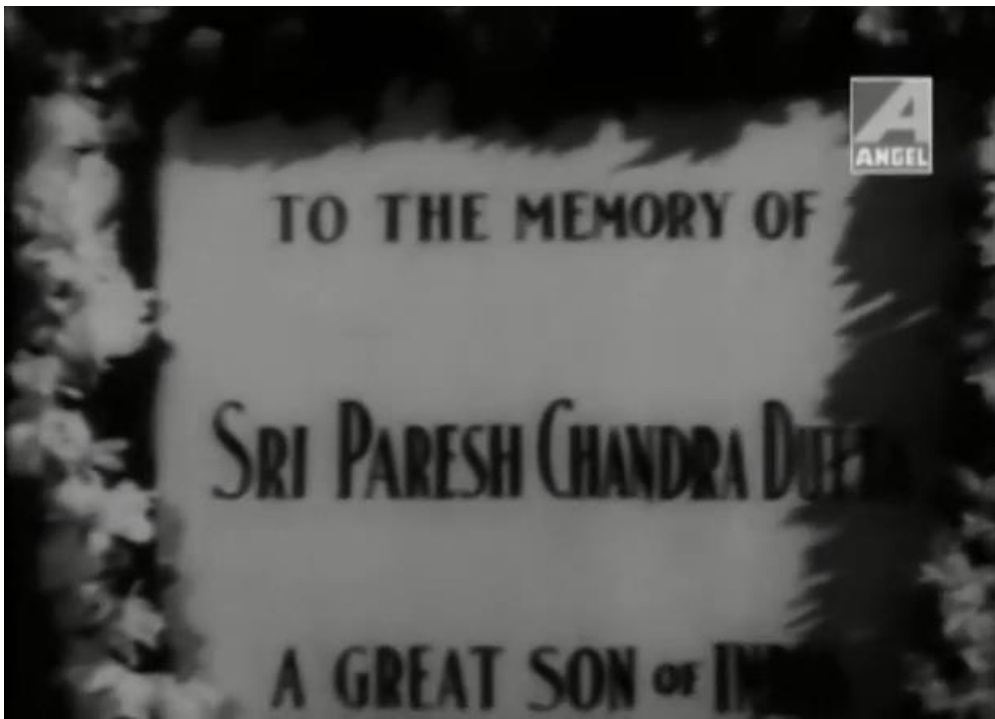
Giribala's plans Some time later, Bhaja eavesdrops on his master and mistress discussing the stone. Giribala is excited— she wants to know the price of gold and how to sell the household trinkets. Paresh remains anxious and afraid, saying this gold is worse than stolen goods and compares it to a myth about cursed treasure. He prays to Goddess Kali's framed picture to absolve him and wants to throw the stone away. Giribala replies that they should sell the gold before throwing away the stone as she wants to move to Benaras with the money, which will be enough. She had a sign as her left palm was itching for a few months, a superstition indicating that one will come into wealth.



A taste of good things Paresh visits a bullion shop on a busy street to sell some of the trinkets that the stone has turned to gold. He says they belonged to his great-great-grandfather. Then he takes a taxi to ride around the city just to relax. He holds up and admires a thick sheaf of bills and the stone and seems happy.



Dreams Passing by the neighborhood of his old office, he dozes on and off. He first dreams that he has become an important personage. He inspects soldiers and a band plays in his honor as he salutes them from a pedestal. The taxi passes by a statue. In a second dream, he sees a memorial statue unveiling of himself, with a voice expounding his life and works in a manner typical of political rallies.



Cultural Program A young man announces the end of a cultural program on the backdrop of a stage on which several dignitaries are seated. He stumbles on enumerating the great deeds of the chief guest and major benefactor, Paresh Chandra Dutta. Paresh, adorned with a flower garland, rises to make a speech about the grand traditions of Bengal, which must be preserved against all odds. He gives a gold medal to all the participants for the dance, music and recitation competitions.



A new normal A jeep pulls into a palatial mansion. A uniformed chauffeur opens the door for Paresh, who enters his new home. A uniformed bearer takes his shawl and he goes to his office, where he's greeted by a young man, his new secretary Priyatosh Henry Biswas. Priyatosh hands him a stack of cheques to sign. He rings a bell on his desk and in a different room, his old servant Bhaja gets dressed in a fast-forwarded sequence. Paresh inquires about Priyatosh's well-being and reminiscences about his own youth. Priyatosh complains that he's working too much and donating unnecessarily large sums to undeserving organizations. Paresh replies that they adore him and will be the ones to support him. He has received an invitation to a cocktail party at Seth Kripalan Kachalu's house. He's overjoyed by the news.



A gift for Giribala He then runs across the house to meet Giribala, who is playing an upright piano and singing. He pulls out a necklace from his pocket and tries to put it on her. They laugh and chase each other around a large bed.



A conversation In another fast-forwarded sequence, Bhaja gets out of one uniform and into another. Paresh and Giribala discuss getting more jewelry and she says that she's afraid someone might discover their secret. They awkwardly fall silent when Bhaja brings an ornate hookah. After Bhaja leaves, he says not to worry as he will be running for elections and be a political bigwig soon. Giribala complains that all she wanted to do was visit holy pilgrimage sites. She is worried about her old neighbors including Poltu, but Paresh tells her to forget them.



Priyatosh makes a phone call Priyatosh, relaxing at his desk with his feet up, discusses his employer with his girlfriend over the phone, emphasizing the fact that Paresh has no children.



Cocktail party Paresh, dressed elegantly, is greeted by the host, Seth Kachalu. He introduces himself to important guests but is socially awkward. Ignored and stared at as an outsider, he slinks to a corner, gets drunk and behaves more inappropriately, laughing and singing a popular devotional song off-key. Some guests also start singing, while some others are discomfited and one tries to shove him outside. Angry and drunk, he shows 'what I can do' by touching the stone to a statue on a mantel, which turns to gold. Chaos ensues and he leaves, waving.



Disillusionment The next morning, Paresh is dazed and hungover while Giribala is angry with him for getting drunk. Gathering up her jewelry boxes, she flings them in front of him, saying that she never wanted this life and is going to leave.



SECRET DISCOVERED

Secret revealed Priyatosh is sitting at his desk and making a phone call to his girlfriend. He turns and notices Paresh standing behind him and asks about his health. Paresh turns an iron paperweight to gold in front of his eyes. He tells Priyatosh that he was a clerk at Calcutta Bank and found the stone at Curzon Park. Priyatosh is stunned and recites some lines from Tagore's poem *Parash Pathar*. Paresh says this is the source of his wealth— but there is only sadness in his expression.



Formula for the philosopher's stone Seth Kachalu visits and tells Paresh all his guests thought the transformation of the statue to gold at the cocktail party was a magic trick but he's not convinced. He wants to see the stone and Paresh gives it to him. Seth Kachalu turns a fancy lampshade to gold and wants to buy the formula for the stone. Paresh gives a fake formula supposedly in Sanskrit— but it is actually the earlier nonsense poem. Seth leaves, cautioning him that there will be trouble if the formula doesn't work.



Letting go Paresh rushes inside, afraid, and tells Priyatosh that he must escape. The enterprise has become public now— there's no saying who will come after him. He plans to escape to his brother-in-law's house out of town with some cash and jewelry, leaving the house and all other possessions to Priyatosh. He didn't want to leave his property to his only heirs, two good-for-nothing nephews; plus Priyatosh would need them for a successful life and marriage. He then hands Priyatosh the stone. Seth Kachalu has the formula for the stone analyzed by a Sanskrit, who laughs at the nonsense poem.



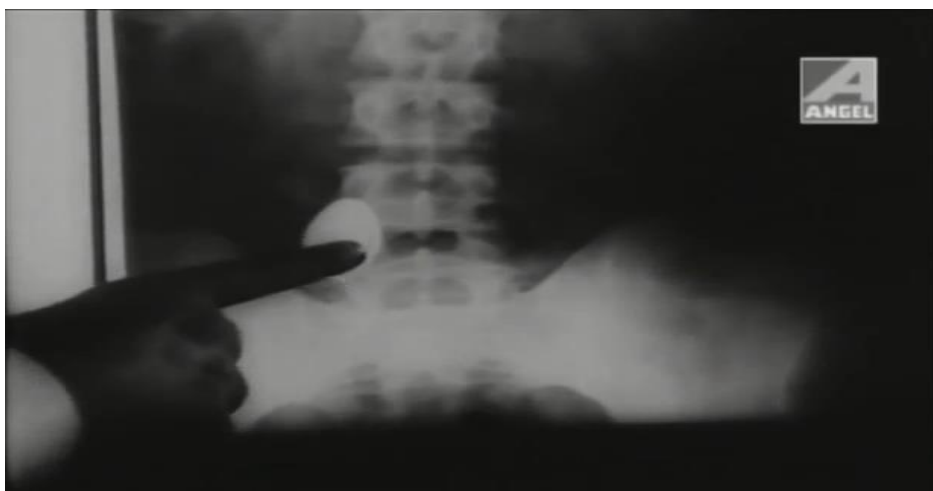
All is lost! Newspaper prints headline—“Iron turns to gold”!! A jeep pulls out of the mansion, with Paresh and Giribala riding away. They hear a newspaper vendor shouting the “Iron turns to gold” headline. Inside, Bhaja goes to Paresh’s desk, searches and lies back on his master’s chair after ringing the bell. He then finds the stone on Priyatosh’s desk. As he’s about to pick it up, the phone rings suddenly and he falls to the floor, startled. Priyatosh, mid-shave, rushes in to receive the call. In a one sided-conversation, he tries to convince his girlfriend that he didn’t know anything about the stone. But she, having read the news, accuses him of lying to her, ends the relationship and hangs up.



Priyatosh swallows the philosopher's stone Paresh is visibly anxious to leave town, but his car breaks down in front of Victoria Memorial. Police arrive at the house, but Bhaja is slow to respond to the repeated knocks on the door. They charge in and ask about Paresh; missing him, they go to find Priyatosh. He is found choking on the stone that he swallowed as he couldn't find any cyanide.



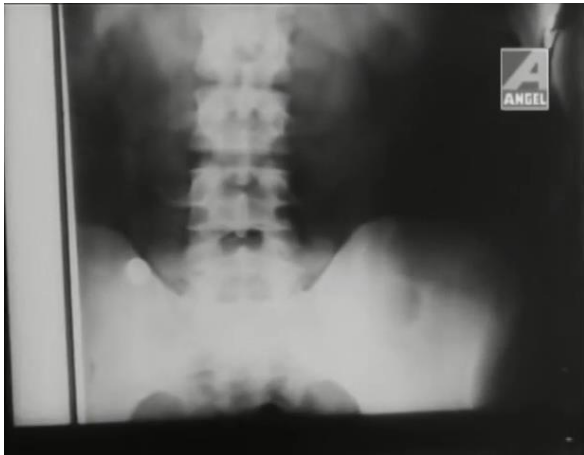
Police interrogation Paresh and Giribala are interrogated at a police station with gold cannonballs as evidence and accused of smuggling gold. The inspector shows the newspaper story and asks about the formula. Paresh confesses about the philosopher's stone and giving it to Priyatosh, which the inspector finds hard to believe. The inspector receives a call from the superior arresting officer, who says that Priyatosh has swallowed it and is being x-rayed; he may have be operated on to remove the stone. The arresting officer waits, playing with a gold paperweight, while Priyatosh is x-rayed in a cumbersome revolving machine. The inspector, his tone milder, asks about the history of the stone, which Paresh haltingly describes. Despite hesitating and knowing a popular adage that 'greed leads to sin, sin leads to death', he gave in as he had never had anything nice in life. Almost in tears, he lists his meager personal acquisitions with the gold— his house, car, jewelry for his wife and some shares. He mostly spent the money on charitable donations, never harmed anyone and never indulged in gambling. The doctor shows the arresting officer Priyatosh's x-ray with the stone in his stomach. It's location makes operating impossible.



Mass panic Narrator's voice-over returns, stating it is a historic day for Kolkata. The newspaper headlines have caused a mass furor about the value of gold, which will fall sharply if supply is higher than demand. Crowds of people try to sell their gold and the share market takes a hit. There is mass panic.



The stone disappears! Priyatosh is x-rayed again after a few hours. The doctor laughs and tells the arresting officer that Priyatosh is digesting the stone and it will soon disappear. He calls the inspector, who's infuriated and orders Paresh to be jailed. But the gold cannonballs turn back to iron in front of their eyes, as do all the other transformed objects.



POOR LIFE AGAIN

The end In the last scene, Paresh, Priyatosh and Giribala are seen riding away in a horse-drawn cart.



CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Paresh Chandra Dutta Open/Emotional (Imaginative, Altruistic, Vain, Anxious)

Paresh is introduced as a harried, overworked and underpaid clerk set to be handed his termination notice just a few years before retirement, meaning he would lose his pension and have no savings for his old age. However, his life circumstances show him to be imaginative, honest, charitable and an overall sensitive character who has the fortitude to make the best of whatever life throws in his path.

Imaginative Despite his meager life circumstances, it is clear right from the beginning that Paresh has not lost his sense of imagination— whether in giving the interesting marble to his neighbor's son as a toy 'atom bomb', or realizing that it was the fabled philosopher's stone. The little jig he performs when he first discovers its properties and his obsession with Sukumar Ray's nonsense poem also show his imaginative side. He uses the poem again to fool the greedy Seth Kachalu later in the film, laughing at the expense of the latter's ignorance.

Altruistic Instead of simply turning greedy, Paresh here is a nuanced comedic lead. He spends most of the money he makes by using the philosopher's stone for charitable causes, instead of increasing his personal wealth. He is sometimes over-generous, as for instance when he hands out gold medals to every single participant at the cultural program. Priyatosh reminds him of this, but Paresh emphasizes that no one should be deprived of donations, however small. His general detachment from all this wealth is also seen in how easily he hands over the stone and his possessions to Priyatosh.

Vain Paresh's 'character flaw', if any, isn't greed, but vanity. His first dreams of what he would do with all the gold are indicative of his desire to be on a pedestal, literally and metaphorically. He wishes to be honored in his lifetime, like a great political leader and he dresses just like that both in his dream and reality, Nehru cap and all. But he also wishes to be remembered and respected after his death. The vision of the inscription on his own memorial statue would otherwise be macabre. But here it indicates just the opposite. For a person with no children or close family, the admiration and remembrance of strangers is all he could hope for.

Anxious Despite his unbelievably good fortune, or perhaps because of it, Paresh develops severe anxiety. From beseeching the Goddess Kali, to being forever afraid that others would discover his secret, to getting drunk at the cocktail party when he's shunned by the more elegant, wealthy guests and revealing his secret, to nearly breaking down when questioned by the police inspector— many instances explore this weakness of character. As the protagonist, he is also the comedic lead and much of the comedy is depicted as some form of anxiety— from running to escape the rain or trying to hide the stone. In any case, it would be amiss, at least according to the prevailing traditional aesthetic *rasa* norms, for Paresh to be a noble, brave and otherwise "heroic" hero, instead of an anxious and vain one.

Priyatosh Henry Biswas Conscientious (*Responsible, Romantic*)

(A simple, honest and romantic young man, he manages Paresh's financial affairs, keeps track of his charitable activities and writes his speeches. In his spare time, he makes long phone calls to his girlfriend.)

Responsible Priyatosh is a responsible and trustworthy young man who has Paresh's best interests at heart. He writes speeches for him on a prompt schedule, prepares a number of cheques to be signed and even makes lists of charitable donations to sundry organizations. He does not hesitate to critique Paresh for allocating Rs 50 to the All Bengal Muscle Club and brings it down to Rs 5. He is also almost a son to Paresh, who has no children. Paresh trusts him enough to leave the philosopher's stone and all his property to him.

Romantic When he is not managing Paresh's financial affairs, Priyatosh makes leisurely phone calls to his girlfriend. He even asks Paresh for some gold for the engagement ring and Paresh is happy to oblige. A hallmark of romanticism in Indian popular culture is how quickly one is ready to sacrifice one's life for their beloved, suicide or otherwise. This receives a satirical treatment here as Priyatosh's rash decision to attempt suicide is purely comedic and not at all tragic. In any case, he seems to have moved on unscathed from this experience at the end of the film.

Giribala Dutta Agreeable (Superstitious, Uncomplicated)

Paresh's wife, Giribala, appears much younger than him in the film. As typical of middle class households in Kolkata at that time, she manages the household, instructs the manservant and generally takes care of Paresh within their limited means. She is more talkative compared to Paresh's more introspective/withdrawn character.

Superstitious Like any typical wife of a middle-class bank clerk in 1950's Kolkata, she is somewhat superstitious, linking events with portents. We see two instances of this. One, when she says her right eye has been twitching, indicating potential bad news, when Paresh mentions that nothing has advanced at his job position. Two, after Paresh shares the philosopher's stone with her, she mentions that her left palm was itching, indicating that money was coming her way. She does not obsess too much about it and after those initial scenes she doesn't mention any more portents.

Uncomplicated Paresh seems to trust her fully and he shows her the stone first after discovering its miraculous powers. Though she acquires much wealth, Giribala, like her husband, does not turn greedy beyond improving their standard of living. She dresses better, wears some jewelry and has the leisure to engage in her hobby, singing. But that does not make her forget her roots in the shabby building they lived in earlier and she remains concerned about her old neighbors. Being of a pious nature, she wants the money to go on a religious pilgrimage and they seem to be on their way there at the end of the film.

THEMES

SOCIETY (Class, Myth)

Class Finding the philosopher's stone afforded Paresh a distinct rise in economic class, but not so much in social class. From a dilapidated building tucked into a corner of the city, he was able to move to a mansion; from walking and using public transport to having his own chauffeur driven car; hiring a personal secretary and many servants instead of one— examples abound. However, all this wealth soon becomes a millstone around his neck and at the end, he is only too happy to return to a simpler life.

Social class, however, is somewhat more complex in this film. In the context, *bhodrota* – a peculiar Bengali affectation encompassing hospitality, generosity, kindness, humility and certain, often contradictory, moral and ethical values– shapes accepted modes of behavior across the broad economic middle-class. Paradoxically, the lower one is on the middle-class spectrum, the more potent is their effort to practice *bhodrota*. This is seen in an early instance when Paresh lets other employees ride the elevator, even though he was there first. With Paresh's rise in economic class, however, he is unable, or perhaps not completely willing, to let go of these middle-class modes of behavior. For instance, he dances a little jig after receiving the invitation to the cocktail party— his lower-middle-class life experience had never before afforded him the opportunity to literally rub shoulders with members of the upper class. No matter how bespoke his attire, his manner and behavior betray him and the other guests at the party shun him, preferring their own cliques. After getting drunk, his inhibitions are lowered and he devolves to being a 'drama queen'. Singing and flinging off his jacket, he finds a few like-minded guests who join him, but the overall impression on part of the guests is of horrified outrage and a flagrant disregard for *bhodrota*. Thus, Paresh's attempt to rise in social class was disastrous and ultimately led to his secret being revealed.

Myth The myth of the philosopher's stone, imported from the west and widely known in Bengal at that time, receives a satirical treatment in the film. This legendary alchemical substance could turn ordinary metals into gold and could even confer immortality. Its treatment in the two direct references found in the film are clearly metaphorical and satirical. The first is Parasuram's short story, on which the film is based. The second is a reference to Rabindranath Tagore's poem *Parash Pathar*, which Priyatosh recites after receiving the stone. In the poem, a crazed, emaciated man wanders a beach and touches every stone he finds to an iron chain on his waist, waiting for it to become gold. One day, a boy points out to him that the chain on his waist is golden, but the man, habitually not looking at the chain, has no idea when or where he found the stone. Again, he resumes his search with renewed vigor. The irony and metaphor are quite evident— the modern man wastes away his life, chasing an impossibility and never even noticing when he found and lost the treasure he sought with all his heart.

A second, related myth overlaid on that of the philosopher's stone is the story of landowners (*zamindars*) who would seal young Brahmin boys with their treasure underground. The boys then died of hunger and suffocation and were cursed to protect the treasure forever until a person of the landowner's bloodline turned up to claim it. In local parlance, the story would come to suggest any gain that was ill-begotten, as if it was cursed. Paresh initially refers to the stone in terms of this story as he is unsure that he deserves such luck.

JUSTICE (Guilt)

Guilt Paresh and Giribala both experience varying degrees of guilt because of their new-found fortune, thanks to the philosopher's stone. Both of them remain unable to completely discard the lower-middle-

class socio-cultural values they long held, even when they move up the social ladder. Giribala, a simple, pious and kind homemaker, holds on to her dream of going on a pilgrimage and cannot condone Paresh's single instance of getting drunk at the party. So much so, that she threatens to leave after throwing her jewelry boxes in front of him. She also remains concerned about her old neighbors, likely from guilt of leaving them behind and not helping them financially. Paresh, for his part, experiences much hesitation and guilt after acquiring the stone, even comparing it to cursed treasure. His dance-like movements and laughter turning to sobs in the early scenes clearly show this. Perhaps this very guilt in acquiring something by pure luck which he isn't sure he deserves compels him to spend this money altruistically.

FLAW (Greed)

Greed This character flaw is observed not so much in Paresh, who, even after using the stone, does not appear to become avaricious and let go of all restraint in lining his own pockets. Rather, we see it in two characters who have small but key roles. First, Seth Kripalan Kachalu, who is a caricature of a wealthy Marwari businessman in Kolkata, is intensely motivated by greed. His initial reason for inviting Paresh to the cocktail party was to begin a business relationship. After Paresh turns a statue in his house to gold, he keeps it secret from his guests, passing it off as a magic trick and instead personally visits Paresh to coerce the formula for the stone from him. Foiled by Paresh's nonsense poem, he takes revenge by leaking the secret to the newspapers. Second, Bhaja, Paresh's manservant, is also very interested in the stone, having learned of its secret early on by eavesdropping. He does attempt to steal it when Priyatosh leaves it unattended, but is startled by a phone call and leaves hastily. That said, though greedy and lazy, at least he does not rob the old couple in their sleep or murder them! And finally, when the newspaper headlines cause riots, we are shown many short scenes of random people robbing and trampling over others.

APPEARANCE (Secrets, Dreams)

Secrets Paresh's success hinges on keeping the philosopher's stone a secret, as is amply demonstrated once the secret is revealed. The cycle of secrecy begins with Poltu, his neighbor's son, who while returning the stone to Paresh, tells him not to tell anyone else. Paresh furtively brings the stone home, initially hiding it from both his wife and his servant, Bhaja. Even till the end, we see no indication that Bhaja has been directly told the secret, as when the couple stop speaking abruptly when Bhaja brings the ornate hookah. Paresh reluctantly shows it to Seth Kachalu when he attempts to coerce him and to Priyatosh whom he trusts, that too when he had no other option but flee. Seth Kachalu himself does not tell his guests that the statue Paresh touched with the stone had really turned to gold, but he makes sure to get it appraised as solid 24 carats. The police also try and keep the whole incident under wraps, keeping a close eye on the couple, Priyatosh and the examining doctor. In fact, the only recurring character in the film who has no secrets is Priyatosh and he is punished for it as his girlfriend believes otherwise.

Dreams As an overworked, underpaid, older clerk with no future prospects, not even an assured pension, Paresh is not introduced as a character with many dreams. If anything, the drudgery of his daily existence was enough to snuff out them for good. Only after he acquires the philosopher's stone does he dare to dream of something bigger and better, though clouded by guilt and hesitation. Leisurely riding around the city in a taxi that he could not have afforded earlier, he nods off. He first dreams that he's inspecting a line of uniformed soldiers and then saluting from a pedestal while a marching band plays and another soldier holds an umbrella over his head adorned in a Nehru cap—the very image of a respected political leader on Republic Day or Independence Day. The second dream takes this further, as he sees a giant statue of himself, garlanded as on an inauguration day, with his many great deeds being announced by a voice off-screen. Besides these two direct dream sequences, other characters also dream of benefiting from the stone's powers – Giribala wants to go on a pilgrimage; Priyatosh wants to get married; Seth Kachalu wants to be richer; and even the police inspectors want it, presumably for promotions and funding.

Discussion Questions

1) Critics have argued that the comedy, irony and satire in the film are lost on international audiences. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss with examples.

2) How would you analyze the protagonist? What are his character strengths and weaknesses? Do any of those resonate with you?

3) Which minor/recurring character do you find most striking and why? Discuss with two examples. (Giribala/ Priyatosh/ Bhaja/ Seth Kachalu/ Police inspector)

4) Analyze the concept of class as seen in this film.

5) If you had found a philosopher's stone, what would you do with it?