# **The Babus of Nayanjore | Summary**

The story begins with a description of the **Babus of Nayanjore**, who were once **famous landholders** who led **decadent lives**. However, after the flood came, they lost all their glory; the last **“relic” of this lost glory is Kailas Babu.** When he was a boy, his family had **reached its lowest point.** After his father’s death, their ancestral property was sold to liquidate the debt. Kailas Babu then left Nayanjore as a poor man and settled in Calcutta. His only relative is his granddaughter, Kusum.

The narrator mentions he is a **neighbour of Kailas Babu in Calcutta**, and the story of his family is just opposite that of the Babus of Nayanjore. While they had **ancestral wealth, the narrator’s father was a self made** man who never spent money recklessly. He worked **hard and gave the narrator the best education**, and he too is well-established. The narrator dislikes Kailas Babu because of his **attachment to his lost wealth**and reputation. However, because he did **no harm to anyone and was always warm and cordial,** people were never particularly vexed by him.

Kailas Babu would always remain smartly dressed, no matter the time of day. He had some **family heirlooms left—a silver cruet, a filigree box, a shawl, a ceremonial dress, and an ancestral turban—**which he would occasionally bring out and try to **keep up the reputation** of his family. He was a modest man but thought this act was his “sacred duty”. He would be called **Thakur Dada** in the neighbourhood. He would talk about a kind of tobacco his family had when they were rich, one that was**expensive and better**. He would deflect from the topic if he were asked to produce that tobacco now, which he claimed he had. Similarly, each time he spoke of giving the neighbourhood a**grand feast, the people would put it off**owing to summer or rain, and the game would go on.

No one would doubt his grandiose **exaggerations of his Nayanjore wealth**, which vexes the narrator greatly. An even greater reason for his **dislike was that Kailas Babu had not yet offered him the hand of his granddaughter in marriage**. He goes on to say that he may have wasted time in college, but morally, he is a **flawless man** and will only marry someone who is worthy of him. But such a “peerless creature” probably did not exist in Bengal.

The narrator decides to play a**cruel joke** on him. Kailas Babu’s friend was a **government servant;**every time he met Kailas Babu, he would fuel him with **false praise and say that the Chota Lat Sahib inquired about him** and greatly praised the Babus of Nayanjore, which greatly pleased Kailas Babu and made him think that the Chota Lat and himself were friends from long ago.

The narrator one day tells Kailas Babu that the **Chota Lat is to pay him a visit,** which greatly **excites Kailas Babu**. The narrator had dressed his friend up as the Chota Lat Sahib, but Kailas Babu could not figure that out. He had all his heirlooms spread out and had dressed himself in his ceremonial robe and turban. As his friend dressed as the Lat Sahib rose to depart, his two **companions carried the heirlooms from the room into the palanquin.** The narrator, who is in the other room suppressing his laughter, cannot suppress it anymore and goes to a **different room to laugh**, where he sees **Kusum sitting in a corner and weeping.**She asks him why he hates her grandfather so much and why he is deceiving him.

A change comes over the narrator as he realises that he has**caused great pain to a tender heart**. He had never seen her as more than Kailas Babu’s granddaughter, but now he sees **the human being that she is**. He returns all the stolen goods secretly to Kailas Babu’s servant, Ganesh. **His heart is touched**when he sees Kusum asking her **grandfather about the Lat Sahib’s visit,**which greatly pleases the old man. She does her part as a **dutiful granddaughter.**

The narrator asks her hand in marriage, and Kailas Babu acknowledges, **for the first and last time, that he is a poor man and that** great fortune has fallen on him. It was also the only moment when he forgets that he belonged to the family of the Babus of Nayanjore.

# **The Babus of Nayanjore | Analysis**

**Conflict is one of the salient themes in the short story,**The Babus of Nayanjore by Rabindranath Tagore. The writer portrays conflict of two kinds through the story; **conflict between classes and conflict between generations.** Kailas Babu, once an affluent man with great dignity and riches to his family name, has now been reduced to poverty yet keeps trying to **maintain that image of glory through continual grandiloquence.**He insists on spreading out his heirlooms time and again, claims to give the neighbourhood a grand feast, and talks about expensive tobacco.

The narrator says that he considered it his **“sacred duty”** to uphold the family reputation and cling to the past, a cause of great vexation for the narrator. Kailas Babu’s **“arrogance”**annoyed him no end, to the extent that he tried **crushing it by stealing the heirlooms.** This can be read as **representative of the upper class’ continual confiscation of resources**that rightfully belong to the lower class on the **socioeconomic spectrum, in the Marxist sense of the terms.**In addition, the narrator, a self made young man is greatly vexed by the old Kailas Babu’s**constant reminders of the past,** and no one stopping him is a cause of great irritation for the narrator.

The narrator is also portrayed as **pompous and arrogant**, blinded by his **self-made wealth and riches.** Tagore effectively portrays a bourgeois-proletariat relationship; the narrator, like a traditional capitalist, steals Kailas Babu’s heirlooms. Kailas Babu, though **poor, is modest and humane**, and indeed, the narrator says Indeed, it would have been difficult to find an old man who did less harm than he”. He was courteous and kind, but the narrator, a **high-class, self-made young man, is greatly vexed by his demeanour.**

The narrator is only able to **obliterate the socioeconomic differences** between himself and Kailas Babu when Kusum humanises him; that he caused a young girl pain is what **brings about a change in him and completely transforms him as a person**. Seeing Kusum in tears, he says **“All the ugliness of my cruelty rose up to condemn me”**. His arrogance and pompousness are subdued, and Tagore emphasises humanity as a driver of societies, beyond economic, cultural, and social differences.

## **The Babus of Nayanjore | Character Sketch**

**The Narrator –**The unnamed narrator of the story is an **extremely pompous man** who has immense pride in his family and personality. One can say that the narrator’s **vexation at Kailas Babu** is because the latter does not **‘sing praises’ of him.** He seeks **validation from him** and is annoyed about the fact that he hasn’t yet offered his granddaughter’s hand to the godly man that he is. He constantly **praises himself**, saying that only a “**peerless creature” is fit to be his spouse.**A change comes over him when he sees Kusum crying in a corner of the room. He realises he has hurt an actual human being and is **disgusted at his actions.**

**Kailas Babu –**Kailas Babu is a **courteous and “modest” man**who, in the narrator’s words, was **“always ready with his kindly little acts of courtesy in times of sorrow and joy”**. He comes from a line of ‘Babus’ who held great **prestige and opulence in Nayanjore**. Kailas Babu has been unable to let go of the **glory of his family’s past,**and people often indulge him in his grandiloquence. He represents the common proletariat, whose wealth has been stripped away, and **his assets (heirlooms) are being confiscated by the bourgeois**. The narrator calls it Kailas Babu’s**“sacred duty”**to protect the reputation of his family. The only time we forget the same is when the narrator asks Kusum’s hand in marriage, symbolising his true**love for the child,**which is without any pretence or ruse.

**Kusum –**Kusum can be best described in the narrator’s words; a **“tenderest little heart”.**She appears at the beginning of the story as **an unworthy object of marriage** but later becomes the entity that **humanises the narrator.** She listens to her **grandfather talk about the Lat Sahib’s visit**in great detail, even though she knows the truth of it, just because Kailas Babu loves talking about it. She genuinely **loves her grandfather and is the only character worthy of admiration in the story.**

## **Literary Devices**

1. Hyperbole: As a character, Kailas Babu constantly exaggerates his family’s **wealth and opulence to maintain its reputation.** But particularly in the opening paragraph of the story, **hyperbole** is used primarily to set the background of the titular babus of Nayanjore, who apparently had **unimaginable wealth.**Phrases characteristic of hyperboles include **“**many thousands of rupees over the wedding of kittens”, **“**lighted numberless lamps”**, etc.**
2. Juxtaposition: One might understand the narrator and Kailas Babu’s relationship as a **juxtaposition of classes**; while Kailas Babu’s story is that of **ancestral wealth reduced to rags, the narrator’s father is a self-made man** who gave his son the best education and helped him land on his feet. They belong to **conflicting classes, as** portrayed in the vexation that the narrator feels towards Kailas Babu, who does not validate his**“peerless” and “flawless” nature.**

The Babus of Nayanjore is a short story, translated from the Bengali ‘Thakurda’ by Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. The story chronicles**the rags-to-riches story of Kailas Babu,**who now lives in poverty**with his granddaughter and is duped by the narrator,** who is greatly irritated by his absurd claims about his past, and his **incessant grandiloquence.** In a turn of events, however, the narrator has a **change of heart owing to Kusum**, who humanises him and reveals to him the **cruel nature of his prank. Tagore explores the juxtaposition of classes in his story**, elucidating a **reversal of the capitalist narrator’s mind**to that of a human heart.

"The Living and the Dead"

Summary

Kadambini is a widow with no child who has an incredibly close relationship with her brother-in-law’s son. A deep affection develops between them, as strong as the bond between a mother and son. But one night, Kadambini suddenly dies. The family calls for four Brahmins, who take her to a temple, where her body will await ritual cremation. But that very night, while her watchmen are out smoking and looking for firewood, her body stirs. Kadambini awakens from death and walks out.

Having come back to life, Kadambini finds herself in a strange in-between. She wants to return home, but tells herself that she is not alive, and knows she would not be welcome to return. She realizes that even though the living fear the dead, the dead fear the living as well.

In her wanderings, she is found by a man who believes she comes from a good family and wants to help her get home. While Kadambini doesn’t think she can return home, she asks the man to take her to the house of her childhood friend, Yogmaya. The man complies, and when Kadambini arrives, Yogmaya is overjoyed. Kadambini offers to work as a servant in her house, but Yogmaya refuses, and invites her to stay.

But that time Kadambini stays in Yogmaya’s house is strange. Increasingly, the house is visited by ghosts. Kadambini herself feels like she is dead, and can not enjoy living in her friend's house. After a period of time, Yogmaya gets fed up with Kadambini’s presence, and demands to know why her husband has not questioned Kadambini living in their house. So the husband embarks on a journey to Kadambini’s family house to find out why she isn’t living there.

What he finds out is that Kadambini in fact died. Yogamaya doesn’t believe it, but late at night while the two are quarreling about the matter, Kadambini comes to confirm that she did indeed die. They kick her out of the house and Kadambini returns home. Her brother-in-law’s son is glad to see her, and she finally feels alive again. But everyone else is petrified of her presence, begging her to leave the boy alone. Kadambini tries to convince them that she is alive, but they refuse to believe it. Finally, she throws herself into a well in the courtyard and dies there. It is only by dying that she was able to prove that she was alive.

Analysis

"The Living and the Dead" combines two of Tagore’s common short story forms: the supernatural tale and the ironic parable. Here, Tagore plays with the idea of being stuck between life and death—also explored by way of the man in the loincloth in "Thoughtlessness" as well as Chandara in "Punishment"—this time using the trope to explore the state of ghostliness. We see Kadambini wandering aimlessly and deeply concerned about how she will be received by the people who were close to her prior to death. Indeed, even though they see someone who looks like a living woman, they refuse to take her as such, and are deathly afraid of her.

The irony is that indeed she is alive, if ever so improbably. That narrator tells us that this happens from time to time, but the characters in the story aren’t so enlightened. Even though, for example, Yogmaya accepts her old friend as perfectly alive for the majority of their time together, she can no longer see Kadambini as anything but a ghost when she learns of her previous death. Tagore’s depiction of understanding here is a strange, wry, and ultimately understated claim that preconceptions can work rather unintuitively, to render the people we see right in front of us into the type of people they are not.

The idea of changing the way one sees someone else is explored in "Kabuliwallah" as well, when the narrator talks about no longer seeing the Kabuliwallah as a would-be murderer, but as a father like himself. In both that story and this one, the capacity to see people for what they really are is in question. And in this odd parable, Kadambini ultimately has to change herself to fit the idea people have of her: she must throw herself into a well and finally achieve that death, in order to be recognized as having been alive.