

## **Lecture 18**

### **Sonata**

Good morning, let us now complete our discussion of Mahesh Al Kanchuwas plays, with the last play, which belongs to the latter phase of his career as a play. Right? Which is called, 'Sonata'. And Sonata was also made into a film, which was released about two or three years back and the play itself features three women Subhadra, Aruna and Dolon and the play is set in the in a rather posh flat, on top floor of a tall skyscraper, in Bombay. And the setting itself connotes, a physical sight that conveys a sense, of cocooned, security that is threatened again and again from within, through the relationships between the women, all

the three women are in their forties, they have known each other since college. And two of them Aruna Dolon live together in the same flat, they've been living in the same flat for 17 years. And the play is a night from their lives, the entire play takes place over the course of a single night. And it kind of conveys it also suggests Elkanjma's engagement with, the event in the everyday. Right? How is the mundane lives of these women temporarily ruptured, by the animosities, between them, the growing estrangement between the women? And how in some sense this animosity these attacks, that they make, these allegations that they make against each other, is partially you know unmitigated and restores their friendship, to certain extent by the end of the play. So, the play really depicts, the subtle power dynamics, between the three women. And the both the intimacy and the violence that are mutually reinforcing conditions of their friendship. And so, the play has these very subtle ways of showing or depicting, hidden animosities and secrets that lie beneath, their friendships that in some sense constantly, you know rupture, undermine, reconfigure, their emotional, intensities and the relationships, but in some sense also reinforces or restores, you know the intimacy between them. So, Aruna and Dolon form the central double, in the play and Subhadra who is the third one it's, it's basically Subhadra's entry and exit, into their flat, which is the transformative moment in the play. So, Subhadra is a woman, who is she's a journalist? And she has enough she has several affairs but she's also in a relationship, with a wastrel a drunk, who abuses her Anna swords. So, she has a violent relationship with this man that the other two women Arun Aruna and Dolon do not approve of. So, they judge her and they hold on to their own apparent privilege, their own apparent sense of superiority, by judging her and the lonely typist neighbor, who does not appear in the play but she is typing away and you know it's, it's they either both the Aruna and Dolon used Subhadra, Affairs as well as, the lonely typist neighbor, as the measures of their reference, in order to give themselves, a sense of privilege and superiority. So, the apparent state of stability, in the lives of our own is temporarily interrupted by the entry of Subhadra. And the kind of life and her lifestyle, which they judge her for, the fact that she has other Affairs that she has a relationship with a violent man and she also rationalizes the violence, of the man.

And she also tells them that he/she even hits him back whenever he or she or he hits up, rationalizing the violence that seems to come with intimacy of any kind and this correlation of intimacy with violence is also reflective of the relationships, between the women. So, Subhadra exits, you know the two women Aruna and Dolon have you know the, Subhadra as a frame of reference, as some as a foil that would give them, their false sense of superiority and privilege and they end up attacking each other, bitterly towards the end of the play, where we discover later on that Dolon had had a brief sexual encounter with, Aruna's estranged long divorced husband. And so, that in some sense, brings out a sense of deep sense of betrayal and, and repressed sexuality which comes with it. And so, they, they argue with each other they attack each other, but Aruna also he's willing to actually let go of the past and, and their friendship, is restored or albeit altered to a large extent. And you also have, have these mentions of Dolon's she's Dolon as a is a banker and she's a very restless woman, she's obsessed with her own health and the food that she eats she's Bengali. So, it's her constant references to and performances of Rabindra Sangeet and her bottles of perfume that become our private obsessions, as a way of trying to constantly conceal, her own insecurities her own vulnerability, similarly you have Aruna who is Sanskrit professor? Who's intellectual creative pretensions again our obsessions that manifest themselves in her own private space and you have you know Subhadra, whose adoration of the, husband of our boyfriend, her partner, as well as, you know her constant amorous raptures of the male teacher, who taught them in college, again becomes a way of, veiling her own the violence that characterizes her life, her own insecurities and the fact that she knows that the other two women Aruna and Dolon judge her for her life. And so, she Subhadra you know you

know when she comes back when she when she enters the flood and she's come to see them, Aruna sarcastically calls tells her that you have come to see your, you've come to visit your transit lunch. So, it's almost like as the other two women and her friends are hurt or a source of temporary relief, to which she returns now and then when she needs to, feel better about herself, but then also realizes that the two friends of hers are not, always the source of comfort that she assumes they are but that they're also you know the also judge for her lifestyle. So, let us first look at the how the opening of the plane, where it is only just one act the play only comprises one act. And it's the stage directions or other elaborate, it describes the rather wealthy flat, on the on the fine suburbs of Mumbai, the stage directions are as following, a fine terrace-flat one of the finest suburbs of Mumbai, the drawing room is filled with fragile delicate objects, glass tabletops porcelain object, crystal vases it's obvious that only women live here. So, the, the objects that are visible the present on stage, are delicate objects, objects that can break. So, the objects themselves suggest the fragility, of the relationships, between, the women that are actor that are even in the play you know breakable that they could actually, make it actually be, ruptured and exposed, for what they are at any point in time, three steps down the drawing room is the terrace, the apron should be used for the terrace, on the left is a door leading to Aruna room, the two doors in the back one leads the kitchen and the other serves as an entrance to the flat, between the doors is a wooden cabinet with intricate carving, against the wall, the area on stage left has a coffee table and a few low chairs upstage, on the left Aruna, working desk and chair and a rocking chair on the right not a road leading to Dolon's room upstage on the right or sofa a center table and a TV, facing the Cyclorama, near the door leading to Dolon's room, is a small curved table on which is an array of perfume bottles of all shapes and colors, beyond this we see the skyline of skyscrapers, it is evening when the play opens, the windows of the skyscrapers will gradually lit up. And then fade as the play progresses Aruna and Dolon on the stage. Aruna 40-ish once beautiful but now fading, in a Bengal hand loom sorry, glasses are tight burn on her nape, very professional is correcting papers on her desk, Dolon same ages Aruna, is an old much worn but obviously expensive dressing gown, plump stylish boy cut shuffling around aimlessly, she's one of those people who bear expensive clothes, carelessly she starts trying to, put the room in order, but in her effort to do so, she brings more disorder into it. Aruna is making great effort to hit know her friends noisy activity, but finally cannot take it anymore.

So, the play opens with a very stark contrast between the two characters, Aruna and Dolon, Dolon is someone who dresses up who wears her expensive clothes rather carelessly. Right? She seems to be someone who's rather self-indulgent and seems to be almost indifferent to her own privilege, but then also makes it makes it a point to exhibit, it to show it in her clothing and the way she carries herself, she's very restless woman she's always flitting around the flat, trying to draw Aruna attention. And there's also an unspoken secret desire that that our Dolon has Aruna, which becomes more evident in later in the play. And she is she is a woman who was constantly trying to judge, Aruna for being this absolutely disciplined, boring, perhaps even pedantic, Sanskrit scholar and professor, Aruna on the other hand is very seems to be very well-kept, she is she seems with other self-sufficient, she's very disciplined. We see her grading papers and laughing at her students in contempt, for their awful answers, they're awful writing. And you know there's also three or Bengali cultural presence in the drawing room, because Dolon's Bengali Aruna's Maharashtra but then she's also dressed up in a Bengali handloom sorry. And looks very she seems to have an air of experience expensive simplicity. And she also seems rather emotionally distant, she's not a woman who likes to be touched, Dolon seems to be the person who was physically expressive demonstrative, with her affections is very talkative and you know rather rebellious and constantly makes fun of Aruna of being this absolutely, you know self-contained, disciplined and boring

woman scholar. So, Dolon also becomes a rather caricature of Bengali-ness, in the way she is constantly, talking about food and how Bengali penchant for good food, she is obsessed with eating, eating well she's also obsessed with the weight she's been putting on. And how she calls asks Aruna for her validation of the clothes she wears she tries wearing, new sets of clothes, to see if they still fit and she's constantly asking Aruna whether she thinks that she is pretty. And she's elegant and she's desirable, she's also obsessed with her perfumes, she is obsessed with the smell of perfume, just as she's obsessed with smell of food. And but Aruna seems person seem to have much time to for her, she is completely absorbed and lost in her own grading, of her students papers. And her own knowledge of Sanskrit and then she constantly utters these subject lines from the answer papers, now and then interjecting Dolon's lines and dialogues. And, and you also see, how the both women used the typist a lonely, typist neighbor. And so, Bertha's Affairs later on as a reference point for their own judgments and privileged lifestyle. So, it you see it in page 251, where Dolon you know makes fun of Aruna for her Maharashtra in a middle-class, nature or typical Maharashtra, middle class nature her jealousy German towards Bengalis of how Bengalis seemed to be entitled to their own artistic and cultural, you know lifestyles and tastes. And that you know very often you see you also see Aruna asking our Dolon on whether Bengali the only ones who are entitled to art and culture or whether there are other communities like Martians who seem to have their own contribution to make, their own sense of entitlement, towards aesthetics, again on 256 Dolon says looks at the lonely typist. And tells her that she must be awfully , leading a life, unlike theirs which seems to be a lot more exciting. And then Aruna asks how to sing, sing some [Rogindha Sandhi](#) Dolon says I tried once I waved my hand from a balcony and smiled she slammed down her shutters rare for him to the lonely typist or Nast's or to sing but then don't understand simply were very willing. And then Aruna says Iran says why do people dislike me, speak something woman and Aruna says watch out now Dolon, Dolon is crushing a cigarette stub she smokes. Now you will take out the wine, smoke and get sentimental, don't.

So, they obviously, obviously very aware of familiar, with each other's lifestyles, they out there the ways of living. And so, they know each other very well and this is one of those days when, they you know discover that they again discover, their familiar familiarity, with each other and but also the fact that there is a brewing, sense of estrangement and, and violence that will happen will occur in the play. Dolon says you afraid Aruna sing, Dolon you straight-laced middle-class, Maharashtra Aruna ask sir to sing, Arobin a song by a turbine that then Aruna says nobody dislikes you, Dolon friendship with men is bad, unthinkable you dislike me, sorry Aruna be quiet, Dolon sorry I know you've been sharing this apartment for all these years, we have made it our home, is that nothing to you don't on sorry, sorry, sorry Aruna go make some rice, Dolon going to the cabinet, habit we stay together out of habit Aruna if you say so, Dolon and these squabbles, another routine, Aruna which slide disapproval it is not such a bad idea to give up some bad habits, she's talking about, smoking and drinking. Dolon aggressively you mean it is always I who start fights, Aruna is deeply engrossed now papers, no Baba can't live like you, control total self-control, perennial the way you walk, talk, sit, controlled, I like to speak, I like to express myself, yes I am demonstrative and I am not a bit ashamed of it. I don't want the severe lines in my face, a morose face wouldn't move. Alright? So, that's, that's how perception of Aruna someone who's absolutely suppressed, self controlled, doesn't seem to have, a single touch of freedom and spontaneity about, all and she thinks of herself as someone, who's spontaneous and someone who is demonstrative, Dolon is also very extravagant with the money, she spends carelessly she buys expensive perfumes, she buys expensive clothes and she seems to be absolutely living in complete abandon. And then she is this there's again later on to 59 and two and to 60, she's constantly asking Aruna for her appreciation of her beauty, despite a

rage of a figure, despite the fact that she eats and she likes eating. And so, she's obviously she obviously wants Aruna appreciation acknowledgement. And that itself is suggests her own unspoken and secret desire for Aruna. But Aruna seen speed other emotionally, distant and unavailable, she is not someone who wants to think about the past, think about the how Dolon betrayed her by having an intimate encounter with her husband, which he discovers later she does not like black bean touched. So, it's almost like other she wants to prevent herself from being hurt again. So, all now is fairly she, she gives off an appearance of being fairly detached and self-sufficient. And of course this later on we discovers also a facade of, of self-sufficiency, in an attempt to not be hot by her friend. And then later on we see Aruna know you know just mollycoddling, Dolon telling her you know the silliness, the silliness of yours I like it so, butter loves it. Right? So, she drawn I tries on her new clothes and she reappears, in her old dressing gown and she poses up some wine and she's, she's, she's she has a wine and cheese and she asks Aruna have it but she's not interested and she says I'm going to be a compulsive eater, no anorexia or bulimia eat like a pig, grow fat, grow so, enormously fat, that under on that fat the entire city of Mumbai, can be kept illuminated from 15 of August to 26th of January, some kind some you some use of this body, as it as it has outlived its purpose, if it had any to begin with. So, you get a sense of the Dolon, also being a fairly lonely woman who has maybe kind of, you know entertained herself, you know her only pleasure of pleasure and life being food eating and singing and drinking. But Aruna has no it's in no mood to give, her any attention and she's also seems to be a prude, she's not someone who, likes the sexual jokes that Dolon and Subhadra a crack in the in the course to play. And then Subhadra enters and Subhadra again is someone who speaks in a mixture of Hindi, Bombay Hindi and English and she again seems to be someone who is absolutely, you know lives, you know in utter comfort she seems to be another callous herself in her own appearance, she wears expensive clothes she's heavily made-up, but then she also seems to be someone who was extremely cavalier, almost and you know extremely light-hearted at some level and she seems to be very excited, to be with her friends. But then they discover that there is black she has a black eye and under the sunglasses that she's wearing and then they realized that that she has been assaulted by that man she lives with. And again this is the moment where so, but where Dolon and Aruna judge her for promiscuous lifestyle. That she has many relationships affairs with, with men and Aruna disapproves the fact that she is still living with a man who is also. And they are completely you know against her attempts to rationalize, our relationship a violent relationship, with this man and Subhadra says that Aruna says you don't fit into my concept of correct living. But have I given up on you ever Subhadra Dolon on can we ever.

Subhadra attend tenderly no you to never give up on me Thank You Aru, thank you Dolon don't I need a corner to rest my head after that dash in Dolon transit lounge Aruna, shut up, Dolon that's what we are a transit lunch, Aruna forget morality if kicked to society in the back. See it see ask and so, this third point where is this kind of almost shy of schoolish, bank door, being exchanged between the women cracking sexual jokes and using obscenities and foul words that Aruna does not approve of and then they're also they also smoke, which again Aruna does not approve of, she says I'd suppose I did all that sub smoke to drank I can do that, but I'm 40 now and who's to stop me turn around, she holds a Subhadra face in her hands and turned it towards herself routinized it don't move, apply screen with below eyes, is that all or is there more Subhadra wiles and Rob's her face against Aruna a stomach her Aruna puts a hand on a head affectionately, idiot Dolon is watching all this almost moved to tears. So, there's a lot there's a lot of intimacy between the three women, despite the fact that they do have scores, to settle against each other they, they still resent each other in certain ways that they do not approve of each other's lifestyles, each other's way of being and at the same time they also seem to harbor, secret desires for each other and they

also have secrets from each other in fact the most important one being the betrayal that Dolon feels that she has done by having an intimate sexual encounter with, Aruna's ex-husband. Then later on when Dolon praises Aruna for inter professional credentials for having won a scholarship, on Sanskrit then she Aruna is rather ashamed and embarrassed and we also discover that Aruna writes stories for a women's magazine. And in one of the stories she has a character who resembles Dolon. Right? So, Dolon is rather resentful of the rather negative characterization in, in the story in the story of the character, who resembles her she asks she in it the story itself is really about, a woman who is not but not very educated. And a woman who just who reads who leads a rather reckless life. And Dolon is quite upset, she is convinced that the character has been inspired by her and she has a fight with Aruna where she accuses her of you know betraying her, by, by portraying or in a very poor light in the story. Alright? So, that becomes another occasion for a potential animosity between the friends. So, if you look at to a page 271 of act 1 there is a long quote, which again between the women, who want to believe that they need self-sufficient lives. So, Dolon says what awful women we are Aruna we're. Alright? A self-sufficient we own we spend, Dolon self-center, do nothing for the society Subhadra without any commitment, without any ideal, Dolon no ideology Subhadra we're not even feminists, don't be blow money, smoke, drink, Subhadra and my affairs Dolon giggling she what kind of people are we Subhadra decadent but happy we are happy Dolon on unabashedly happy. So, Subhadra abominably happy Dolon obscenely. Alright? So, the women would like to believe that they are fairly self-sufficient women, who on who spend who don't have any commitment to any kind of ideology not even feminism, we blow money smoke and drink. Right? So, but this is this is just their self-perception and this is obviously being eroded from within, across the play through their hidden animosities and secrets. Subhadra who was an editor a newspaper loses her job. Right?

And she has been she's upset that she's been betrayed by, the paper who accuses her of plagiarism for which she loses her job. And then Desiree encounter again between the women who again judge her for having a relationship, with a violent man. And later on after Subhadra leaves there is this encounter between, Dolon and Aruna where Dolon accuses her of misrepresenting her on the story. Dolon says that the story is based on me Aruna no Dolon the hero of your story, she uses freely jazzy clothes, smokes, drinks. Aruna hundreds of women do that, Dolon and Homer our tea is laced with Punjabi Aruna a totally imaginary character, Dolon Punjabi instead of Bengali, why don't you make her Bengali? It have been more authentic or not will you listen to me Dolon and a broken voice, you shouldn't have done that such an old friendship, gone in a minute, foot just like that Aruna look here that woman is not you, maybe some similarities only a few externalities. Dolon don't give me that good night. Aruna wait a minute Dolon I'll pack my things first thing in the morning Aruna will you please listen to me, you hold a big post in a multinational, she's a clerk you're multilingual, she's almost an uneducated Dolon this is my flat, you should leave. Aruna I will but not unless I've stashed this out, yes it's true she's bubbly like you don't on and she touches like, me yes I touch. Right? Easily and everybody, kiss even you find something like that in my touches like that surrenders Aruna gives her a long hard stand and turns to go to a room, roll on shouts it Aruna why don't you thrash it out now. Right? So, long as deeply hot and resents her Aruna for betraying, her she even tells that the story should have been called betrayal instead of Nitra, because it seems to I have a character, who's who resembles her who's been shown in a very poor light, in the story as someone who is where's freely jazzy clothes? Who smokes and drinks? Who leads a reckless life devoid of any responsibility? So, whether or not this is true perhaps one could read this as Aruna attempts to then probably take a jibe at dawn on for her reckless lifestyle, which does not disapprove, of we should not approve of sorry and then later on, Dolon is asked so, to leave because she tells us that the flood

blocks to her. And then later on we, we get to know that Dolon had an affair with Aruna 's ex hospital. And Aruna now we get to know about Aruna's conflicting self perceptions. Aruna was herself someone who wants to lead a very ambitious life as Dolon says you were dreaming of a magnificent career, you were ambitious in dollar G, Germany America conferences and seminars rubbing shoulders with the crême of the world. Right? So, that was a Aruna's life. Right? And so, she realized that she could not be married to a man, who was Avinash, Avinash ex-husband is named Avinash. And Aruna, Aruna realizing that she could not have lived, a life with Avinash because he was Aruna, Aruna calls him as terms of as someone who was celebrated, but still a wastrel. Right? So, she felt that, she would have undermined her life's ambition had she continued to be married to a village. So, she dominates the marriage, but then I said I counted all on she dominates the marriage but Aruna says I'm not so, sure of that. So, Aruna's not Italia willing to accept the fact that she dominated the marriage, despite the fact that she did not want to be married to a man, who would have undermined and been obstruction, to her own professional ambitions perhaps, I would have been able to cope with the Aruna else going on, no I know I'm not a success, but not a failure either I'm living a tepid monotonous secure life, am I not life has passed us by Dolon. So, I think Aruna realize that they have probably passed the bloom of their life. And that they're now leading fairly monotonous privileged lives. And it's the it's a monotony that comes with privilege that in some sense they're trying to displace and interrupt with their own personal rivalries and resentments, because not able to take the monotony of a privileged lifestyle, where they don't seem to like anything apparently. And so, there's also as a moment later on where, they are grateful they are happy that they could in fact the quote, Dolon quotes a poem by Emily Dickinson, which you know valorizes death of she's grateful that, human beings are not immortal what would happen if we were immortal, if there was never an end to life and that we kept on living that will actually find ways of killing ourselves. And so, death is a great source of comfort and relief, from a constant attempt to strive, human strive for more, more and more and never seem to find an end to it. Right?

This constant quest for self-sufficiency and completion and perfection which never seems to end. So, there's this revelation here towards the end of Act one where Dolon tells are now that she went to see avi because, you asked me to, when I came back to the hostel room you were lying on your bed in the dark Aruna, please don't want your tears running down into the pillows, Aruna it was a difficult decision, you did something beautiful then you help me close. Dolon touched your white eyes with my lips, Aruna you drank all my pain, do not I'd never happen, again Aruna no I do not Aruna Dolon Aruna, Aruna Paloma Dolon you ever thought I was giving you signals, Aruna never Dolon but you changed so, much of that evening became remote, Aruna I'll always cherish that moment, boggling for the first time in my life I hadn't recoiled from human contact that but I can't always lead that I was , ashamed you saw me crying. So, Aruna I don't know is somebody who does not want to be seen as, as vulnerable she doesn't want to expose her feelings and that was the only moment they had, which was intimate physically intimate. But ever since then Aruna has a recoil into herself and led a fairly emotional is a distant but lonely life, writing stories for a women's magazine. So, in fact Dolon then ridicules Aruna for leading a life by proxy. And so, she tells she accuses Aruna being insecure that she could not dare to live with the kinds of the wild lives that are tolerant and so, water I've lived, which is why she judges them and she probably derives vicarious pleasure from them by writing stories that are based on her friends. Dolon says we are friends Aruna have a hot you I know I have sorry, Dolon on the contrary I have hot you now you don't even know it I've been holding you for years, Aruna hadn't we haven't we had enough of the sentimentality, don't on don't on I accused you of betraying me Aruna wasn't the first time you said something like that to me, Dolon I have I have betrayed you, you and I we parted ways in that day and

you said to me, go be with him I can manage myself, but he's being ripped about, when I cut when I came back from him I was full of him and I never told you when I went to him he was writhing in pain as I tried to console him. I forgot everything at that moment your relationship with him, our friendship the happiness I got was so, overpowering when I saw you crying I felt like covering you with that happiness, I never met are we after that. But Aruna does not does not confront her with this confession, it's almost like as if she hasn't heard what she said and she goes around organized in the room, which is a mess and this is obviously Aruna ways of guarding her own, sense of betrayal and vulnerability. Dolon would you ever forgive me, Aruna what right to have over him Dolon I'd betray your trust. Aruna I've never thought that other should not get, what I cannot, what's so new and what you did friend all the duties and concerts are keys from Sanskrit poetry, have been doing this for ages, do not sobs Aruna take sign arms enough my precious, it is the past leave it behind you needn't have told me all this you did so, it's Okay?

Get up now and chin up honey, don't on Rises trips against the center table, the perfume bottle, on it falls down Dolon Mago Aruna Subhadra gave it Dolon not a drop left, god Aruna give it to me, one more addition to the collection, these papers I'll have to do them tomorrow, I must try a little snooze don't on I think I will read for a while. And they play, moonlight sonata towards, the end of the play. So, you see that the perfume bottle assorted Subhadra gives her breaks shutters. And so, there's this moment where, after Subhadra's exit, from the flat, the two women you know reveal their hidden animosity towards each other it's very, very subtle wings even the betrayal that Dolon feels she has done to Aruna exposed and revealed by the end of the play. And so, they also lose whatever little privilege and superiority they had over Subhadra, when they bare fangs for the last time towards the end of the play, but then there is also this hint, of where Aruna forgives and is willing to completely let go of the past. And embraces Dolon for the friend that she is and so, there is this attempt to try and restore an exposed wounded friendship. Right? This is how the play ends. Right? So, this is our discussion of Mahesh Al Kanchuwas last play, sonata we will then continue in our next session on our discussion of a new play. Right? Of my inst attorney. Thank you.