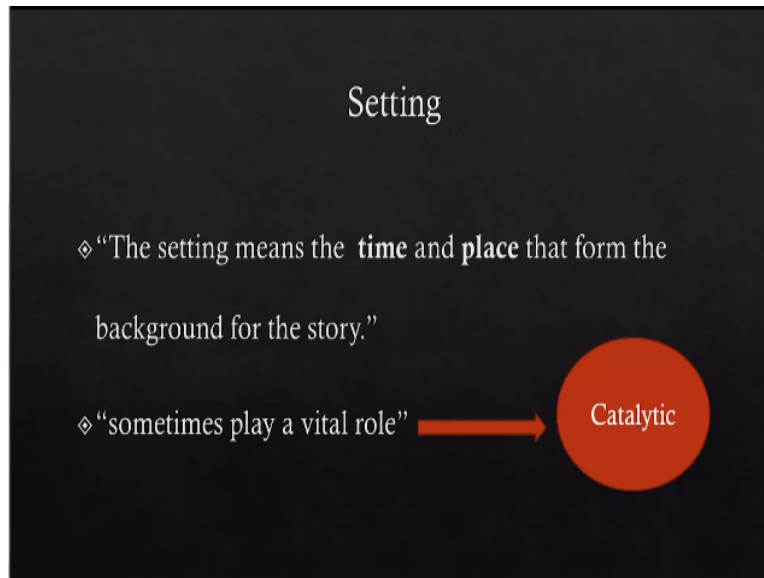


Short Fiction in Indian Literature
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Lecture-14
Plotting the Spatiality of Tagore's Kabuliwala

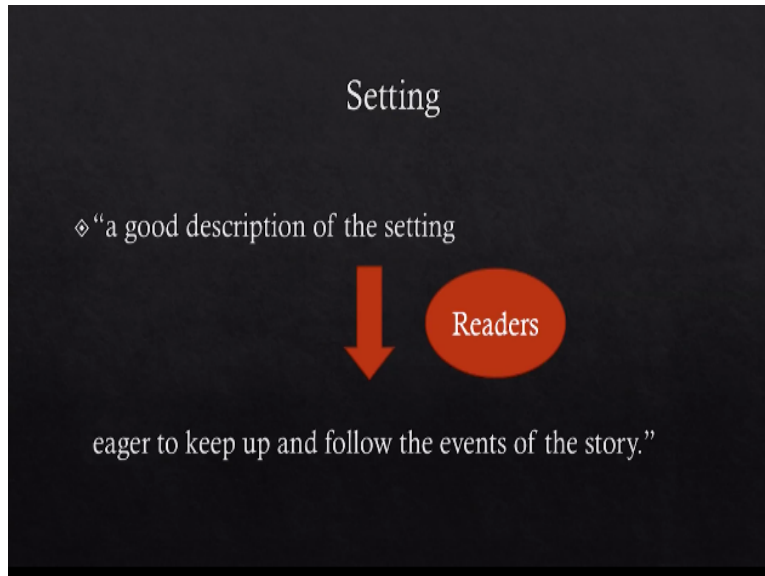
Hello and welcome to this lecture on plotting the speciality of Tagore's "Kabuliwala".

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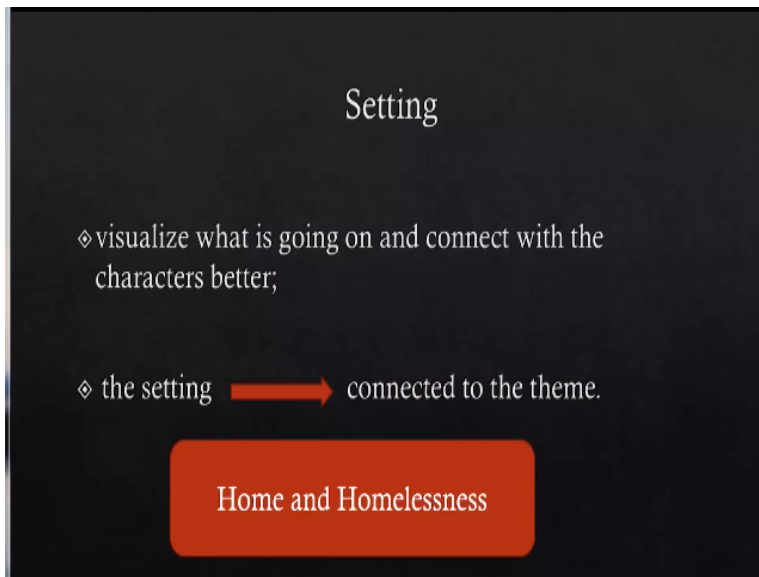
In today's lecture we will talk about the setting in a section, what exactly is a setting. The setting means the time and plays that form the background of the story and setting sometimes place a vital role in a narrator. In fact it can play a catalytic role, in other words the setting can have narrative functions that can complicate the plot and also attains helps to resolve it.

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Now a good description of the setting is key to the success of the story and sometimes such exciting description will encourage the readers to keep up and follow the events of the story more closely. In other words the setting kind of intensifies the fictional landscape.

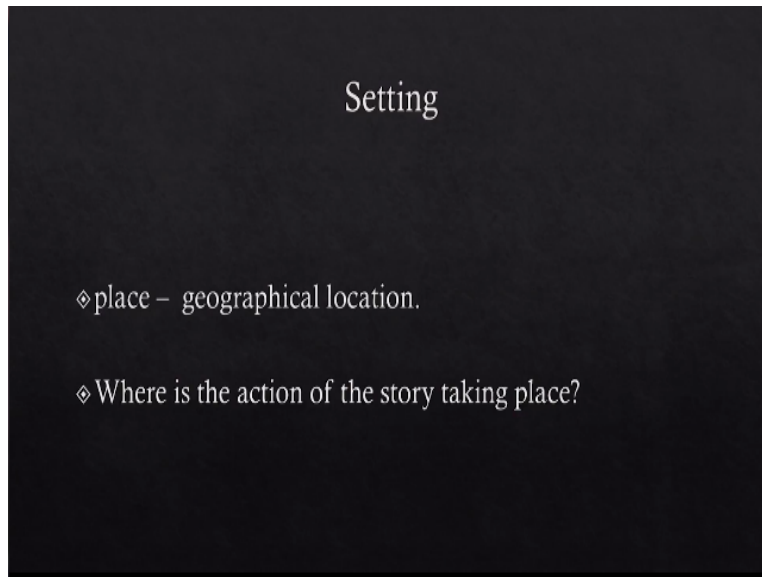
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For the more settings can help the reader visualise what is going on and connect with the characters better. In fact if the story world is stronger, the identification with the things that are happening in the story will be greater for the readers. In fact some predicts are suggested that the setting is also very closely connected to the theme are the major concern of a story. For instance in our case Tagore’s Kabuliwala the reference to the big house of a writer suggest the ideas of home and homelessness which can be one of the major themes of this story.

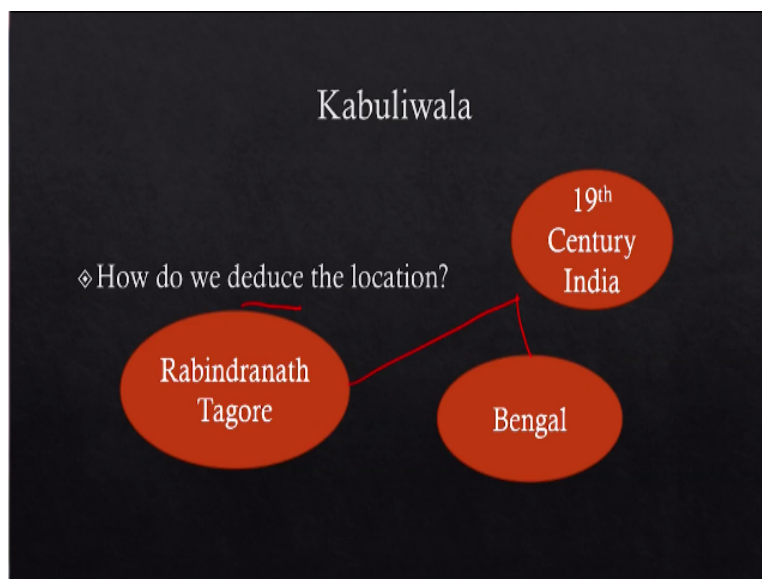
In fact Mini and her father have a home whereas the Kabuliwala does not have one and in fact he is a constant traveller.

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Setting can also mean a place or a geographical location, in fact the question that one should ask quite frequently is where is the action of the story taking place. When a student or a reader first comes across a story this is the question that is to be asked where is the action located.

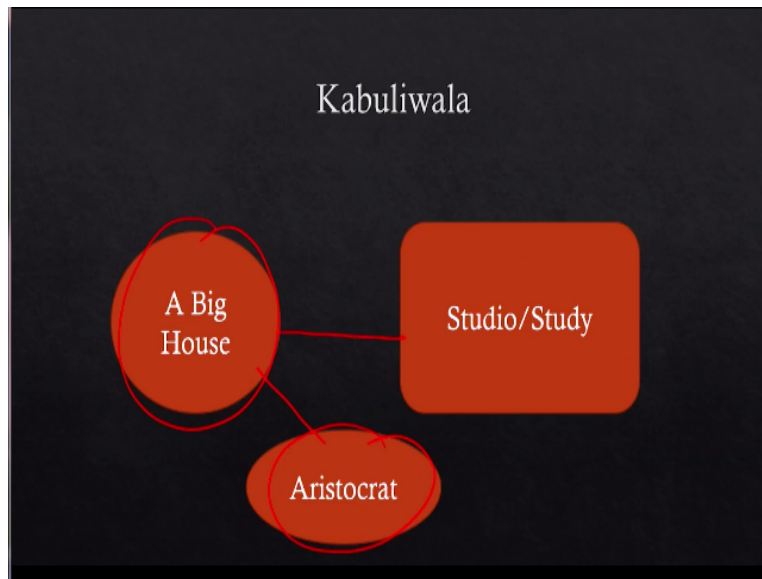
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Now in a context of Tagore's Kabuliwala how do we deduce the location, how do we figure out the location, what are the clues which tell us where this story is situated. The first clue is the

author Rabindranath Tagore most of us know that he is a 19th century writer especially associated with Bengal. So, these facts about the writer already kind of hints or gestures to the reader to recreate in his or her mind, the kind of canvas that story has been painted on.

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Now as I mention before this story Kabuliwala has a big house at it centre in fact many of the instance are situated within the house or close to the house. The other major thing that we should remember is that at the heart of this house is a studio and it has certain significant implications for the bonds that the central child character Mini has with the characters around her and we should also remember that the father of the Mini Father of the girl Mini is an aristocrat.

And an aristocrat typically or usually has a big house to reside in. So, when exactly is the story Kabuliwala located and what are the significance sides in this story. The significant side in this story are these and there is a studio. So, these sides are frequently used to orchestrate important events in the narrator and we got remember that the father of the girl Mini is an aristocrat and aristocrats typically was side in big houses. So, the house and especially the studio have key thematic functions to perform an this story.

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A Big House?

◇ A tent was being put up on bamboo poles in the courtyard of the house, and the chimes of chandeliers being rigged in the portico of every room filled the air.

◇ There was no end to the rumpus

Entrance "a lot of noise"

Now how exactly do we know that there is a big house in this story, there are certain examples in the story to suggest that such as the case. For example let me read an excerpt from the story, attend was being put up on bamboo poles in the courtyard of the house and the chimes of chandeliers being rigged in the portico of every room filled the air, there was no end to the rumpus.

So, this is an excerpt that has been taken from the closing stages of the story and at the end of the story we have the wedding celebrations of Mini who has now grown up. So, she is the bride at the end of the story and her house the writer's house her father's house is being decorated in a grand fashion. And please note that there is a courtyard in the house and there are porticos in front of every room and these are being decorated with a chandeliers.

And these are expensive objects to hang in front of the entrances to every room. So, this gives you a hint as to the scale the lavish scale of this particular house that Mini and her father and her mum inhabit. And the author says that there was no end to the rumpus, rumpus is a word which means loud of noise or commotion and portico means a covered entrance. So, these verbal cues give us a hint about this partial structure that has been employed by the writer to stage is or her story.

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Plotting the spatiality of Kabuliwala

◇ One morning as I had just started writing the seventeenth chapter of my novel, Mini walked into the room and began, 'Dad, our sentry Ramdayal doesn't even know how to pronounce the word "crow."

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Now let us look at others spatial cues in the story and their significance in terms of the theme of the story. And this is a very interesting except that happens at the very beginning of the story. One morning as I had just started writing the 17th chapter of my novel, Mini walked into the room and began, dad, our sentry Ramdayal does not even know how to pronounce the word "crow".

So, the I here is the father of this little girl Mini, so he is in his room and he is writing a story, in fact he is on the 17th chapter of his novel. So, he is a writer, a novelist and this little girl Mini walks into the room and she starts a conversation, she says that this particular person Ramdayal, the sentry does not know how to pronounce a particular word. So, we know that there is a room in which the author in the story that is the father of the girl usually spends his time writing novels, so the studio is suggested here very indirectly.

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Kabuliwala

◇ 'You go and play with Bhola. I have some work now.' At this, she flopped beside the writing table, close to my feet, and began to play a game of knick-knack with her hands and knees, rapidly chanting a nursery rhyme.

You go and play with Bhola, I have some work now and the father tries to send his little girl away because he wants to continue writing occupy a space beside the writing table. So, this is again very suggestive of the fact that this is a room where the father spends his time writing. So, sits close to his writing table at his feet and begun to play a game of knick-knack with her hands and knees, rapidly chanting a nursery rhyme.

So, the father has his occupation in his room but the daughter refuses to leave the space for her father's purposes and she tries to spend as much time as possible as closely as possible to her father.

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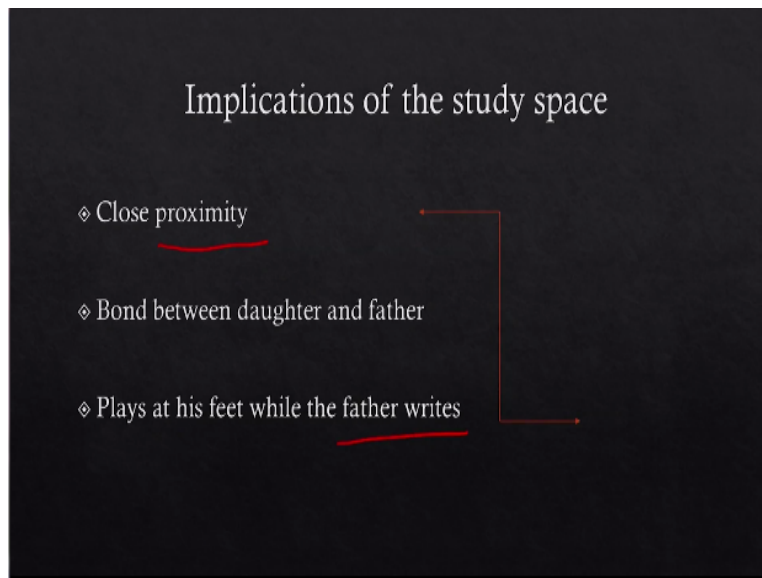
Kabuliwala

◇ Stopping her game abruptly, Mini ran to the window which overlooked the main road, and began calling out at the top of her voice, 'Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala!'

Now there is some kind of noise outside of the room, outside the house and many stops her game abruptly. Mini ran to the window which overlooked the main road, and began calling out at the top of her voice, Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala there are certain spatial cues in this except which again contextualises the room and the house as well please note that the window overlooks the main road.

So, this is a very prominent room in the house it has a significant perspective on the main road not some minor street and the daughter on hearing the voice of the Kabuliwala asks him to come in.

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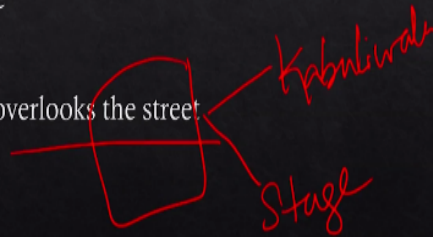
Now how do we interpret the study space what are the implications of the study space in terms of the larger concerns of the story, what do they suggest let us see. The study space suggest close proximity between the father and the daughter and consequently it also suggest that the bond between the father and the daughter is very intense and very close please note that as I mention before the daughter plays at his feet while the father writes his novels.

There is also hierarchical relationship between the 2 but here the emotional connectivity or the emotional association or the bond is the one that is most dominant in this particular except.

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Implications of the Study Space

- ◊ Most important space
- ◊ Prominent location: overlooks the street



As I said the study or the studio or the space in which the father sets down and writes his the most important space in the entire house. And again it has the most prominent context because it overlooks the street and street is where things happen in the public sphere at least in the context of this particular story. Because if you remember it is on this particular street that Mini for the first time captures the Kabuliwala walking by.

And it is the street on which the father notices the Kabuliwala being handcuffed and taken away by the police. So, the street kind of acts as the stage for some of the interesting and important events in this particular story.

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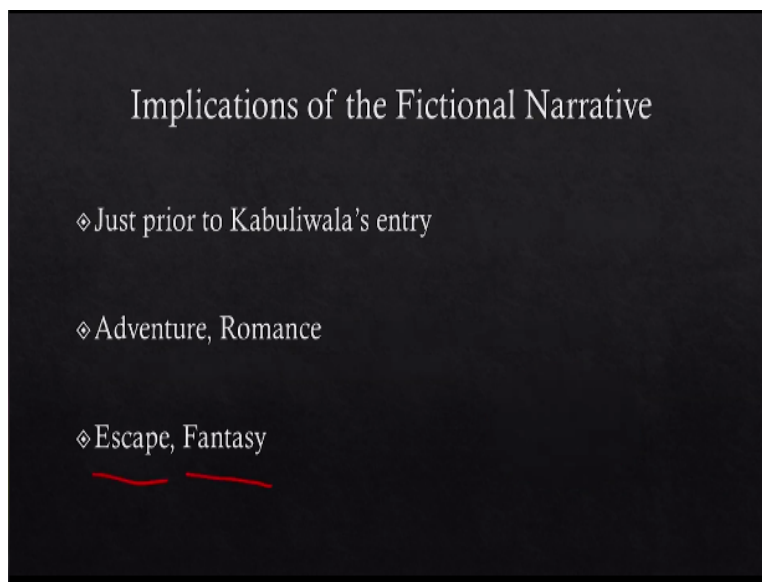
Metanarrative: Kabuliwala

- ◊ In the seventeenth chapter of my novel, Pratap Singh was jumping off the high balcony of the jailhouse at this time, with Kanchanmala, into the river below in the dark of night.

Now let me go back to that metanarrative about the novel that the father, the writer father of Mini is engage in writing. The author narrates the father narrates in the 17th chapter of my novel Pratab Singh was jumping off the high balcony of the jail house at this time with Kanchanamala into the river below in the dark of night. That it is a reference to the story that the father is writing.

So, we need to keep that in mind it is a story within this larger story of the Kabuliwala and the very interesting thing about this except is the speciality again. If you note that Pratab Singh who is probably the hero of the novel, he escapes from a jail house which is very interesting and he escapes along with this female character Kanchanamala into the river below they are jumping off a high balcony into the dark of the night is that into the river. So, this is a very adventurous story at a very first look.

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The other very interesting things about this (()) (13:05) narrative is that this happens this happens this reference to the fictional world created by the father happens before the entry of the figure of the Kabuliwala. It is very interestingly placed I would think and as I said it is filled with adventure and romance we have this figure of the Pratab Singh who jumps off who escapes from a jailhouse with probably his lady love.

So, there are themes of escape and themes of fantasy, imagine jumping of a balcony into the river at night how much more romantic can it get in a story. So, there are a lot of references to adventure and romance in this particular fictional narrative. And this is very strategically located in the course of the narrative of the Kabuliwala. So, we might also want to think about the thematic implications of this metanarrative on the larger story of the Kabuliwala filled with Mini and her writer father.

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Implications of the Study Space

- ◆ Fictional world and the real world mirror each other
- ◆ The hero's escape parallels their escape into the relationship with the Kabuliwala.

Mini & father

Nuances

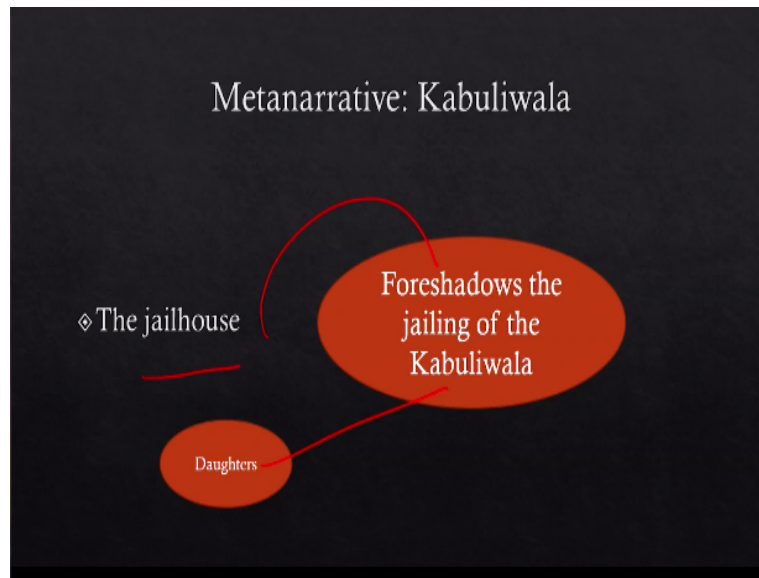
I would interpret this particular scene as a kind of a stage where the fictional world and the real world mirror each other. So, this is the point in this story where Tagore has a fictional world, an interior fictional world, a story within a story interact with the outer story. In other words this could be the embedded narrator very mini embedded narrative with the Kabuliwala story as the outer narrative.

So, there could be some kind of thematic association between the 2 and let us see what they are. One major interpretation that kind of jumps at May is that the hero's escape Pratab Singh's wscape with his lady love or with the central female character parallels their escape that is the escape of Mini and her father into the relationship with the Kabuliwala.

So, there kind of jumping into the world of the Kabuliwala just as Pratab Singh jumps into the river in the dark of the night. So, the Kabuliwala somehow takes the girl and her father and in the

household perhaps into an narrative of adventure and fantasy and if you recall the story, the mother has her own suspicions about this strange of figures. So, this Kabuliwala not only affects Mini and her father, she Kabuliwala also has an impact on other characters in the story. So, there are romances in terms of the relationship with the Kabuliwala has with different characters in the story.

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Now the reference to the jail house in the metanarrative is very interesting, if we quickly go back again to the metanarrative there is this reference to the jailhouse from which Pratab Singh and Kanchanamala is escape. And I would suggest that this jailhouse is a foreshadowing of the jailing of the Kabuliwala for a crime, a grievous crime that he commits at the high point of this story.

And this crime in fact takes him away from the daughters in the story and the daughters in the story are Mini and the Kabuliwala's own biological daughter whom we kind of hear about at the ending of the story.

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Spatial Discussions

◊ I bought a few items and soon I was involved in a rambling conversation with him on various topics including Abdur Rahman, the Emir of Afghanistan, and the frontier Policy of the Russians and the British.

Now let us go back to where the father, the father of Mini first meet the Kabuliwala. So, for example what happens is that he buys a few items from the Kabuliwala because the daughter has obviously invited this fruit petal into the house and he cannot send him away without buying anything. So, what he does is the father buys a few items and soon I was involved in a rambling conversation with him on various topics including Addur Rahman, the Emir of Afghanistan and the frontier policy of the Russians and the British.


So, once is bought the items it is very interesting to note that he does not send him away directly in fact he picks up a conversation, a rambling conversation, a conversation that is that digresses that goes from 1 topic to another a leisurely conversation. And they talk about various things and it is very interesting that the father very quickly becomes a conversationalist even though he did not want to invite the Kabuliwala at the very first time when his daughter invites him.

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Implications of the Subject

◇ Male figures

Political Spaces



1844-1901

Boundaries

Now how do we read this particular scene 1 way to read the scene is to see that these male figures are engage in a conversation that kind of discusses political spaces. If we go back the frontier if we go back to this previous slide, the frontier policy refers to the border policy, the boundaries between countries and nations. So, this talk is about a political spaces and this talk is also about the leader or the political controller of the territory of Afghanistan.

So, it is a conversation that is politically lased in one way or the other, either through a reference to the leader of a country or through a reference to the frontier policies of great nations great and powerful nations in fact

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Kabuliwala: The Writer and the Traveller

- ◇ I am so dull and inert that every time I think of travelling out of my little
- ◇ world, I panic. That's why I used to mitigate my desire for travelling a little by talking
- ◇ to this man from Kabul in the morning, sitting in front of my writing table in my little room

Now the writer in the story, the father of Mini is very self reflected about his attitude towards travelling. Now let us look at a couple of excerpts in that regard because it again ties in with this concept of speciality and mobility and immobility and these concepts have interesting things to say about the thematic concerns of this particular narrative.

Now this is what Mini's father has to say about himself, he says I am so dull and inert that every time I think of travelling out of my little world, I panic. That is why I used to mitigate my desire for travelling a little by talking to this man from Kabul in the morning, sitting in front of writing table in my little room. So, he has a desire for travelling yet very interestingly when he thinks about travelling or moving, he panics, which is why to reduce that desire as well as somehow indirectly travel.

He converses with this stranger from Kabul about these spaces that he is very much interested in. So, they sit in his little room in and they have this conversation and just as Mini spends time in the studio or the study. This man from Kabul also spends time in proximity with the writer because please note that he sits not at the feet of the writer but in front of the writing table.

Still there is a lot of proximity between the writer and this stranger again suggesting a bond that is developing between the 2 figures, the 2 male figures. So, even though he is dull and inert physically in the context of travelling he has a desire which he kind of satisfies but talking about travelling by talking about other spaces and other places.

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Locating the Kabuliwala

◆ To see that huge Afghan sitting in the corner of the house in the dark of evening in his baggy clothes and customary sack would create a sudden fear in my mind.

Now to see that huge Afghan sitting in the corner of the house in the dark of evening in his baggy clothes and customary sack would create a sudden fear in my mind. Let us this is a very interesting except in the context again about this speciality of the Kabuliwala within the home or the house of the Aristocrat. So, when he is sitting in the studio, in front of the writing table there is fear, there is only comradery there is only friendship in some ways.

But when the father returns from his visit to the town when he returns that a house and if he sees a huge Afghan, huge Afghan sitting in a corner of the house in the dark of the evening. In the evening when it is dimly lids when this hardly any light left out natural light left out in his baggy clothes, in his huge clothes in his spacious clothes and with his customary sack, that particular image would create a certain fear in my mind.

So, the corner of the house which is a marginal space in any room and especially the corner is a darkness and the association of the dark corner with his massive Afghan in his strange clothes automatically would at instinctively would kind of provoke a fear in the mind of the writer which of course he would surprise when he sees this little girl have a happy conversation, a joyous conversation with her friend.

Now again if you want to locate the Kabuliwala in a different place in the story we need to come back to the closing stages of the story to do that.

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So, at the finale of the story Kabuliwala has come back after being jailed for several years and he comes on Mini's wedding day and he does not get to have a nice conversation with the little girl who has now grown up and this now a bride and Kabuliwala realises that he is no longer an intimate companion of this little girl and that kind of provokes him to think about his own girl far away in Afghanistan who also would have grown up just as Mini has and might have forgotten about the bond that she had with her father.

So, at this point the writer, the father of Mini sees the Kabuliwala sitting there on the floor of my house in an alley in Calcutta Rahamat that is a Kabuliwala continue to envision see the images of the (()) (24:57) terrains of Afghanistan. So, this particular figure now has become the imaginary travel, the mind traveller so to speak just like the father who is a writer, who also does this travelling across his mental landscape. Now we also should look at some of the objects associated what characters.

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Kabuliwala's Sack

◇ She had this childish fear that if someone looked through the bag of this Afghan man, several living children like herself would be found in there.

◇ “in the dark of evening in his baggy clothes and customary sack would create a sudden fear in my mind”

And the importance they have in this story and the most important object that the Kabuliwala has in the story is his sack. He has a capacious bag and this there are lot of items that he sells to his customers. And when Mini first saw the Kabuliwala her fear was also about this big sack with the big bag that he customarily carries and the writer says that she has the childish fear it is someone lift through the bag of this Afghan man several living children like herself would be found in there.

So, she has this childish or fear that he carries a lot of children in this sack and it is very interesting that the writer says that it is a childish fear but then the writer, the father of Mini himself is somehow frighten by this objects too, remember that quotation that I early read out in the dark of the evening in his baggy clothes and customary sack would create a sudden fear in my mind.

So, the baggy clothes and the customary sack are threatening object somehow when they are associated with this big Afghan man especially at (()) (26:54) especially in the evening. So, it is not a childish fear, it is a fear that also pops up in the mind of Adults too because these objects are not associated with members of his own class but is part of the accessories that the stranger from elsewhere carries.

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Kabuliwala's Sack

◇ 'Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala, what is in your sack?'

Adding an unnecessary nasal tone to the word, Rahamat would roar, 'Hanti.' The essence of the joke was that the man had an elephant in his sack.

Now we can also see that Mini's attitude towards the sack changes because the Kabuliwala himself kind of changes the reaction that Mini has towards this sack. Now let us see how he does that, so when they have become friends the girl asks, Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala what is in your sack, what do you carry in it and the man the food cradler from Kabul adding an unnecessarily unnecessary nasal tone to the word, Rahamat would roar, 'Hanti'.

The essence of the joke was that the man had an elephant in his sack. So, from the point where she thought that he had children in that particular sack, there is a shift where which this man himself brings about when he says that he has a elephant in the sack. And most of us know that children are fond of elephants and when he mispronounces the particular word it adds to the gaiety of the situation.

And the writer says the joke was not terribly funny but to a little girl to see a massive man make a nasal pronunciation of an animal of the name of the animal that is dear to children, it kind of changes the scene all together and it kind of removes the fear that is associated with the bag.

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Kabuliwala's Sack

◇ Sack is associated with the other, the unknown, the mysterious

Outside the norm

◇ Nomads, peddlers, mobile people with a non-wealthy status.

As I mention before the sack is associated with the other, the unknown, the mysterious, the stranger it is not object that is outside of the norm. The norm for a Bengali Aristocratic family which is why they become objects of terror at some points in the story and the possessor of the bag does his bags to change the attitude of the people who are around him through his personal actions.

And we should also note that this particular sack of bag is associated with nomads, peddlers which who are mobile people, people who constantly travelling who move from 1 point to the other with a and these people do not have a wealthy status tagged to their names. So, a combination of poverty and mobility accesses suspicious to these sections in society.

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Kabuliwala's Sack

◆ Remembering their past friendship, he had even brought a box of grapes and a few raisins wrapped in a packet, which he must have borrowed from some Afghan friend because his own customary sack was not there with him.

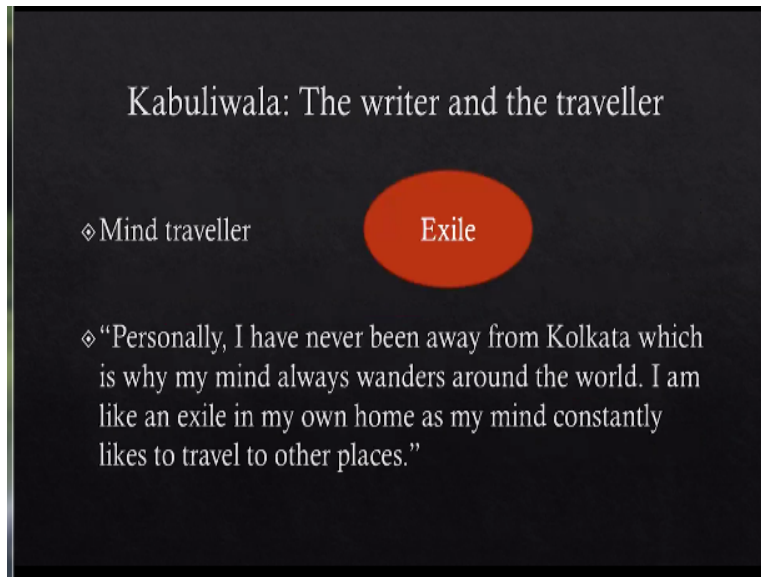
Now let us continue with the concept about the Kabuliwala sack because at the very end of a this story absence of this particular sack makes the scene especially point and this is the except where we can find that. So, he arrives on the wedding day and he is unable to rekindle the relationship with this little girl Mini who is now a bride. And he has a gift to give to this little girl his child her his friend.

This is a except that I would like to read to you. He says remembering the writer says remembering their past friendship, he has even brought a box of grapes and a few raisins wrapped in a packet, which he must have borrowed from some Afghan friend because his own customary sack was not there with him. Now we can see that it is very touching to note that this massive Afghan man who is usually seen in his baggy clothes and with his customary sack is suddenly without that big bag with him.

And despite not having the sack with him he has managed to get a box of grapes and a few raisins that he has wrapped in a pocket. Because he knows that this little girl is fond of these and he wants to make sure that he has these with him when he needs her. And in the absence of the bag and in the presence of the grapes and few raisins, this scene becomes very sentimental and emotional.

And the father notices these objects missing and the present once and he kind of speculates that he must have borrowed these sweets for his daughter from some Afghan friend. He must have taken the trouble to get these box of get this box of grapes and a few raisins for his own daughter.

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Kabuliwala: The writer and the traveller

◇ Mind traveller

Exile

◇ “Personally, I have never been away from Kolkata which is why my mind always wanders around the world. I am like an exile in my own home as my mind constantly likes to travel to other places.”

Now let us sum up the relationships between the writer and the traveller, the Kabuliwala father is a mind traveller Mini’s father is a mind traveller. Even though he calls himself an exile within his own home, he says personally I had never been away from Kolkatta which is why my mind always wanders around the world. I am an exile in my home as my mind constantly likes to travel to other places.

The opposite is true in the Kabuliwala’s case, he is the one who is a real exile, he is an exile from his own home and from his own home country whereas this figure Mini’s father is at home. He is not an exile, he is at home but he is not able to travel to other places which is why he calls himself a metaphoric exile from other places.

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Kabuliwala: The Writer and The Traveller

- ◆ The Kabuliwala blared out stories of his homeland in his broken Bengali and I
- ◆ fancied it all before my eyes: tall, rugged, impassable mountains on two sides, red-hot
- ◆ with torrid heat, and a caravan moving through the narrow, dusty passageway in between; turbaned traders and travellers passing by, some on camel back, others on
- ◆ foot; some carrying spears, and others outdated flint-stone guns.

Now what are the enjoyments that the writer derives through this particular traveller. The most important enjoyment that he gets from his friendship with the Kabuliwala is this the story that the traveller tells him. The Kabuliwala blared out stories of his homeland in his broken Bengali, so he tells stories to this writer whereas he gives grapes and raisins to the writer's daughter.

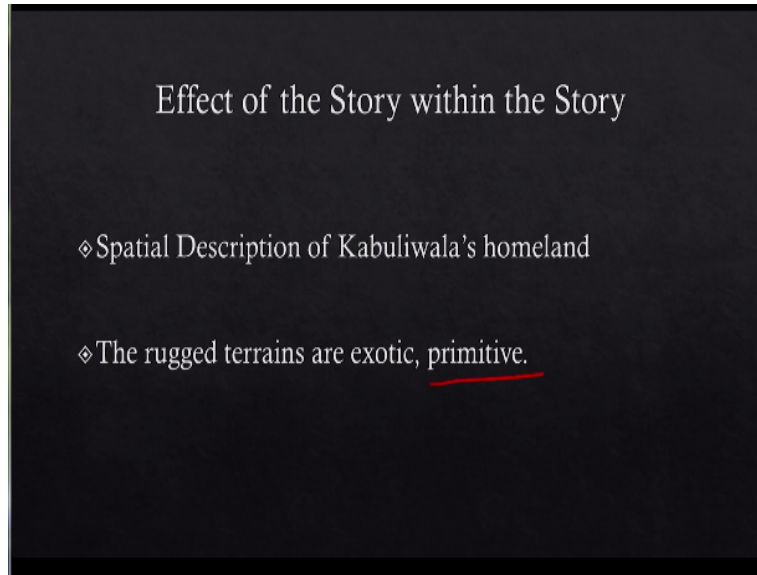
So, the daughter has a relationship which is of a different kind with the Kabuliwala and the traveller has another kind of relationship with the father. And I fancied it all before my eyes and the writing I mean the story telling is so powerful that the listener is able to envision everything before his eyes. So, what are the stories that he tells, he tells about tall, rugged, impassable mountains on 2 sides, red hot with torrid heat.

And a caravan moving through the narrow, dusty passageway in between; turbaned traders and travellers passing by, some on camel back, others on foot, some carrying spears and others outdated flint-stone guns. So, this traveller from Afghanistan tells stories about his homeland we can assume that it is possibly about his homeland because it talks about a hot torrid region dry aerate country.

And it is filled with mountains, it is filled with people who travel on caravans and people who travel on camel back and some people are on foot and they carry sometimes rudimentary weapons with them. For example the out dated flint-stone guns. So, these are cues which tell us

that the narrative is about a primitive community of travellers in a hot dry arid region. And this utterly fascinates Mini's father and look at the choice of this phrase blurred out told in a loud manner in a straighten manner in a decorator manner. And despite his broken Bengali which we should note the audience here Mini's father is captivated by that narrative.

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Now let us look at the effect of this story within the story, I call this the story within the story but the truer description would be spatial description of Kabuliwala's homeland. And the rugged terrains that he describes are exotic because there are camels, there are primitive people carrying primitive weapons and this primitive community of travellers which are narrated by the Kabuliwala somehow eroticizes this particular narrative.

And we can see a resemblance between this narrative and the narrative that the father came up with in the 17th chapter of his novel which talks about Pratab Singh jumping off a high balcony. So, we can see parallels here. There are more than 1 writers here, there are more than 1 story teller in this particular story, thank you for listening, I will catch up with you in the next lecture.