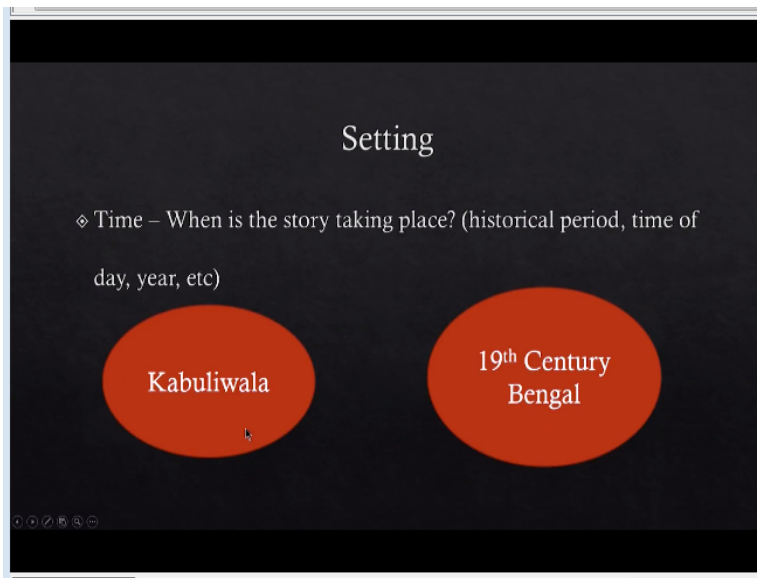


Short Fiction in Indian Literature
Prof. A. Divya
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology-Madras

Lecture-3C
Plotting the spatiality of Tagore's Kabuliwala

Hello and welcome back to this lecture on plotting the spatiality of Tagore's Kabuliwala.

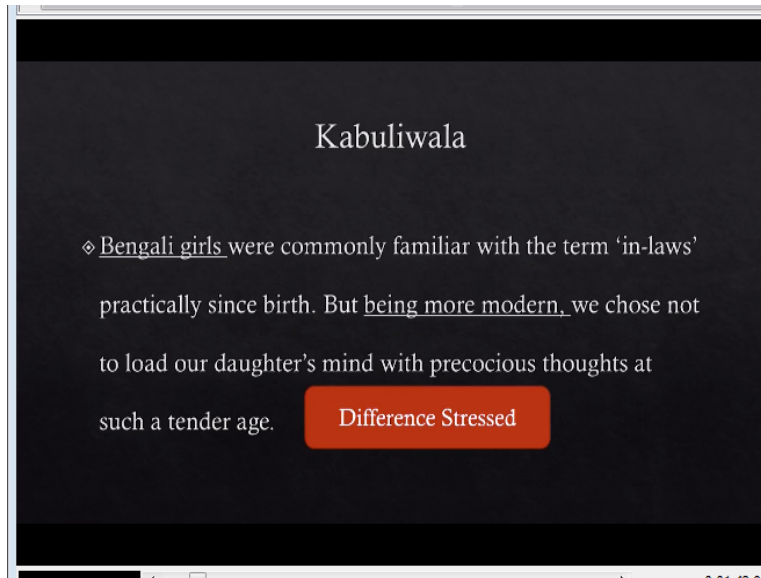
(Refer Slide Time: 00:17)



Now let us look at the time aspect of the setting in a fictional work, so we need to ask this question when exactly is the story taking place. What is the historical period in which this fiction is contextualized or what time of the day is it set in or the year and so on. Now let us come back to our story in question the Kabuliwala, we can guess that it is set in 19th century Bengal primarily because we can assume that Tagore started writing stories at the turn of the 19th century and Tagore is from Bengal.

So, these general cues will kind of help is reasonably guess as to the time of this story. But that is just one way to guess at the setting of the story. We should also look at the narrator to figure out what are the other spatial queues other queues about setting which will give as a more former view of when exactly the story is set.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:32)



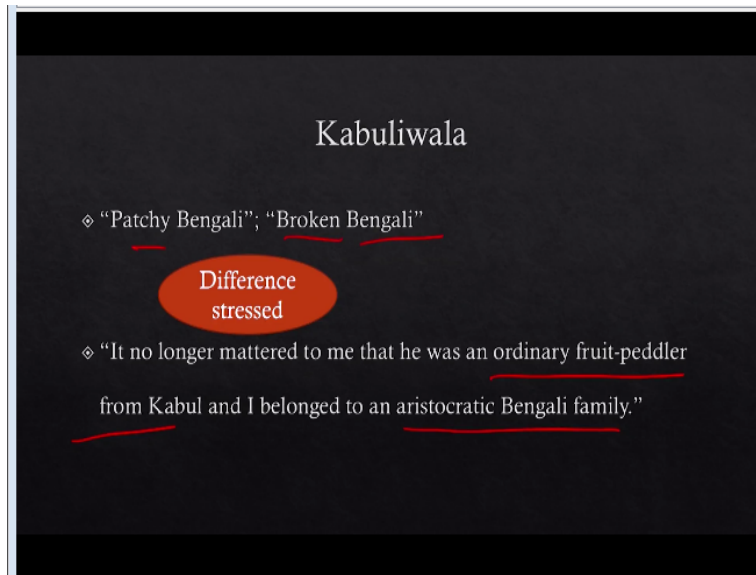
So, and of course the date of publication will also be a big queue as to when her story is set. So, these are some of the queues but we need to look at the narrative queues about setting to be more precise in our assumptions. Now within the story there is a reference about Bengal and this is what the except has to set. Bengali girls were familiar with the term in-laws practically since birth.

But being more modern we chose not to load our daughter's mind with precocious thoughts at such a tender age. Now this story references Bengal very clearly that, so we can clearly note that Mini is also a Bengali and this story is about Bengals world in some respects. And even though Mini is part of this Bengali girls as a category. This particular family the family of the writer is slightly different from the rest of the communities in Bengal.

And that is fact is also highlighted by the reference to this phrase more modern. The father says that we are more modern and therefore we decided not to load our daughter's mind press our daughter's mind with precocious thoughts, thoughts which are not proper for her age and because they would be oppressive to the tender age of the little girl. So, the difference is also stressed okay that is something we need to note.

The difference between the Bengali girls in general and the particular Bengali girl that is an aristocrat and/or writer's daughter in this story.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:36)



Again there are references to this Bengali cultural and social atmosphere for instance the Kabuliwala who is a stranger to Bengal talks in “Patchy Bengali”, Broken Bengali”. And that is something that is reinforced now and again in the story and again the difference is stressed. Language is one of the ways through which difference can be asserted and affirm while the aristocrats speak perfect Bengali.

We can assume the stranger to their world speaks broken Bengali again there is a reference to the Bengali family that the story is about at later stage in the story especially the closing stage in the story. And I quote it no longer matter to me that he was in ordinary fruits-peddler from Kabul. And I belonged to an aristocratic Bengali family, so these words are said by Mini’s father at the end of the story.

When he sees the Kabuliwala is a broken man who cannot rekindle and association with his own daughter and by implication with his own daughter who is far away in Afghanistan. So, at this point he says it I do not care that he is just in ordinary fruit-peddler from Kabul which again reinforces the identity of the Kabuliwala. And the fact that he is a aristocratic Bengali man. So, again we can get all these spatial queues as the narrative progresses something which we need to keep an eye out for.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:17)



Now further queues about time scale in this particular story are these, the story at the beginning says that one morning the Kabuliwala write and a few days later, we see Mini and the Kabuliwala interact with one another. And there is a reference to early autumn as well in the story and at the end of the winter okay let us look at further queues about time in this story.

There is a reference to one morning when the Kabuliwala enters the world of Mini and her father. And there is a reference to a few days when Kabuliwala and Mini meet again and have their fun, there are references to autumn and winter and autumn again. In fact the story begins in autumn and ends in autumn as well, there is a neat circularity in terms of the weather patterns. And we should also remember that the crisis in the story happens in winter and this is in aspect that I will come back in a minute.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:29)

Setting

◊ weather conditions – Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?

◊ One morning I was sitting in my room and reading some proofs. It was the end of winter, but for the last few days, before the season came to a close, the temperature was freezing and almost unbearable. I was enjoying the warmth of a strip of morning sun that had alighted on my feet under the table, travelling through the glass window

So, we need to pay attention to the weather conditions that all described reference in the story. Because they might have certain thematic associate is the weather stormy, when a particular event is happening why is there a storm at this moment in the story and not in other moments. So, these is some of the aspects that we need to pay attention too, so let me quote a very interesting event at that happens during winter.

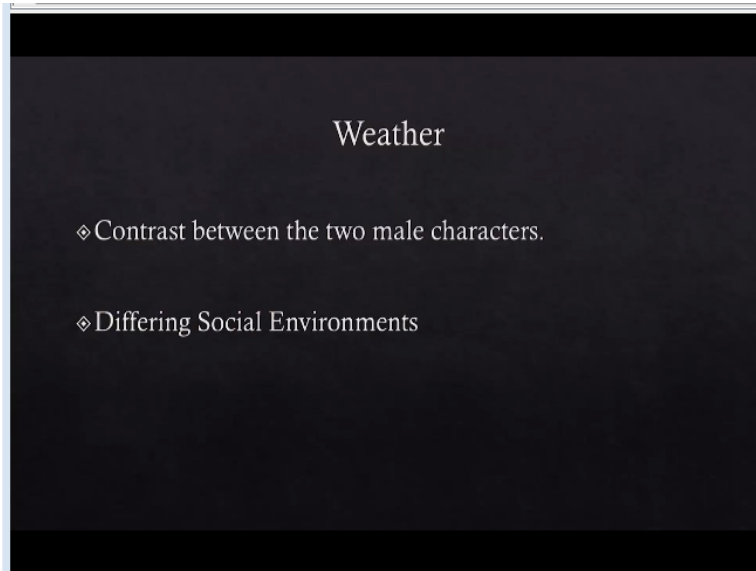
The father is sitting in a study and he is reading some proofs, so that is the moment when this particular thing happens. One morning I was sitting in my room and reading some proofs, the proofs of his novel most probably it was the end of winter. But for the last few days before the season came to a close, the temperature was freezing and almost unbearable. I was enjoying the warmth of a strip of morning sun that had alighted on my feet under the table, travelling through the glass window.

This is a beautifully descriptive passage which talks about the end of winter and the onset of spring. So, the writer is in his room enjoying the warmth of a strip of morning sun really nice ray of warm morning sun that alights like a creature, like a being at a feet under the table. And which has travel through the glass window, it is a very pictures can evocative scene.

While this pleasant scene is being described for us what happens quiet soon after this is that the Kabuliwala is arrested. In fact through his window the writer can see the Kabuliwala being taken

away roughly by toggles and the Kabuliwala is cursing and trying to explain his situation to the onlookers.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:42)



And what is this scene perform in fact, in fact the scene performs he would difference there is a huge contrast between the two male characters between the father of Mini and the Kabuliwala. Here we have one man sitting safely and comfortably in his room enjoying the changing of the seasons. And we have another figure just outside his window being accosted and salted and taken away by the police quiet reasonably. So, because he has committed while and crime but there is uh difference in the social environments between the two male figures.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:22)

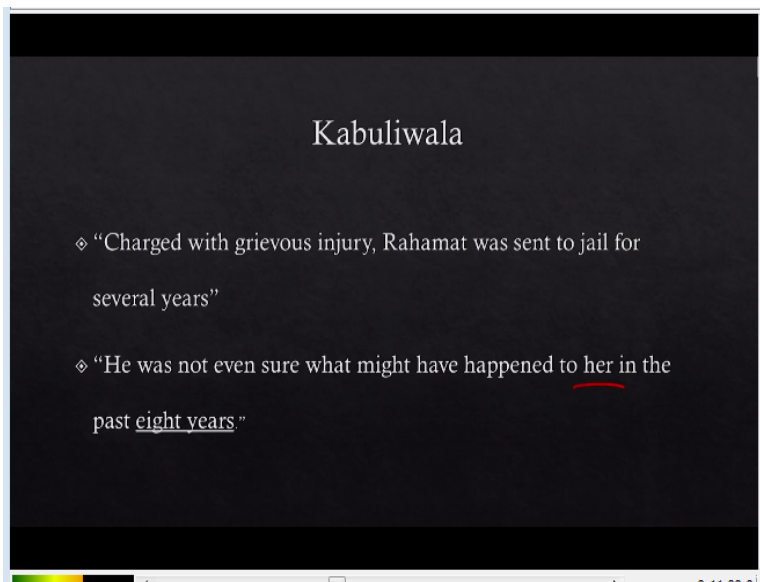


Now this is an aspect that we need to think about that is how long has Kabuliwala been in association with Mini. It is not a long time in fact the writer says that he had been visiting Mini almost daily and by offering her pistachio nuts. He had already won a large part of the girl's childish heart. So, he visits daily and he offers pistachio nuts to the little girl and he wins her heart through these offerings.

And through his jokes and the way he relates to her, in fact if you want to be very precise he comes into the story in autumn and he leaves in winter and then he returns years later, so if we kind of calculate how precisely his perhaps in Mini's circle from October to February less than 6 months. And that is the nature of the duration of the friendship between the two is a chart we need to think about it.

And then he leaves the world of Mini because he has been arrested and he has been put in jail for several years 8 years, in fact and then he comes back later to kind of reclaim the friendship with the little girl.

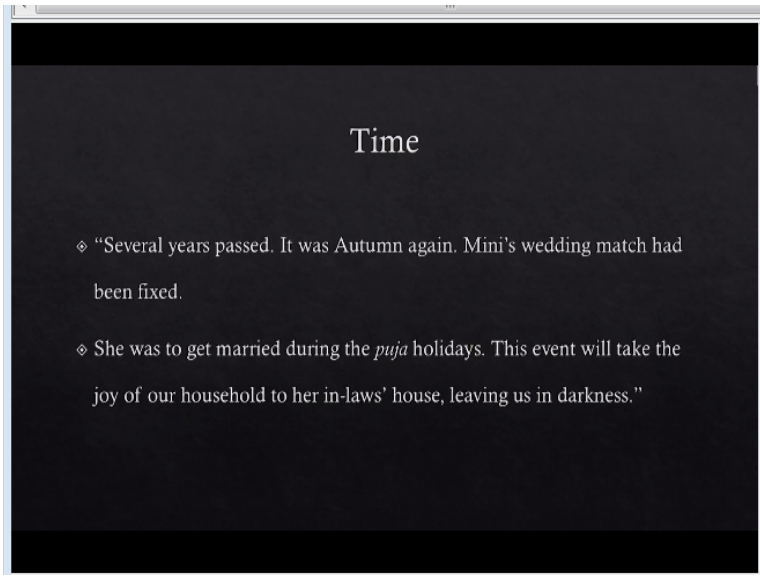
(Refer Slide Time: 10:43)



So, this is what the narrator says charged with grievous injury, Rahamat was sent to jail for several years. And the narrative kind of tells as the precise year number of years that he has won a way at the end of the story. When the writer says that the father figure says that he was not even

show what might have happen to her that is her being Rahamat's own daughter in the past 8 years, when he has been jailed in Calcutta.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:14)



Now as I said the story begins in autumn and it ends in the month of autumn again. So, we can also think about the importance of this particular season what sort of season autumn is and what is the thematic implication for certain events to be initiated at this particular point in the year. So, the narrator says several years past it was autumn again Mini's wedding match had been fixed. She was to get married during the pooja holidays time of great festivity and celebration.

This event will take the joy of a household to her in-law's house leaving us in darkness. It is very interesting to see that the loss of a child through this event of the marriage being associated with the darkness of her home her parent to the home. So, that is spatula association is very interesting but the presence of the daughter is somehow symbolically connected to joy and absence to darkness is a very interesting fact that is reference in this story.

(Refer Slide Time: 12:27)

Locating Kabuliwala

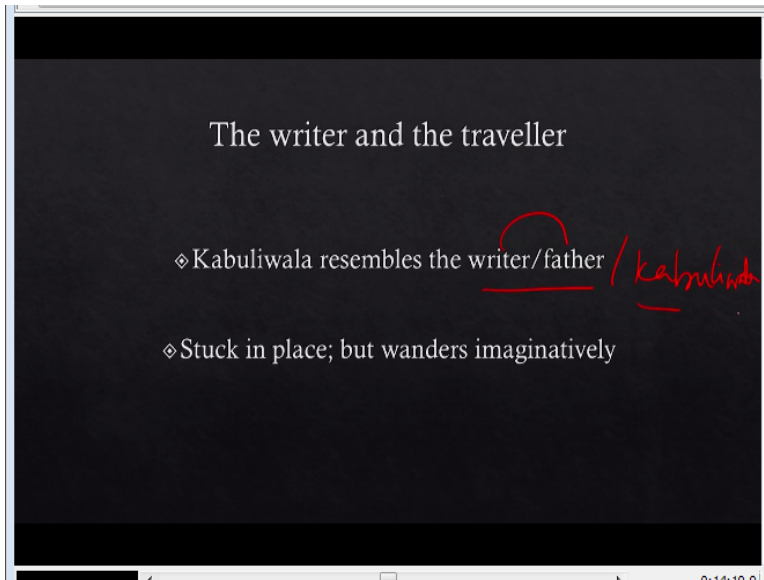
◇ sitting there on the floor of my house in an alley in Kolkata, Rahamat continued to envision the images of the arid, hilly terrains of Afghanistan.

Now if we locate the Kabuliwala the fruit-peddler from Kabul at the end of the story, he is not in Kabul he is not get gone back to his country Afghanistan. But he is in fact sitting there on the floor of my house in an alley in Kolkata and he continued to envision the images of the arid hilly terrains of Afghanistan. So, this father of Mini sees the man sitting on the floor and thinking about his own country, the arid, hilly terrains of Afghanistan that is where the Kabuliwala is located at the end of the story.

And it is a very interesting idea because he is a man who constantly travels but he is for some reason of the other cart or trapped in situations where he cannot travel. So, even at the end of the story when Mini's father offers him money and so that he can travel back to Afghanistan and meet his little girl this man is seen by the readers within the home of this aristocrat on his floor in an alley, in a street in Calcutta.

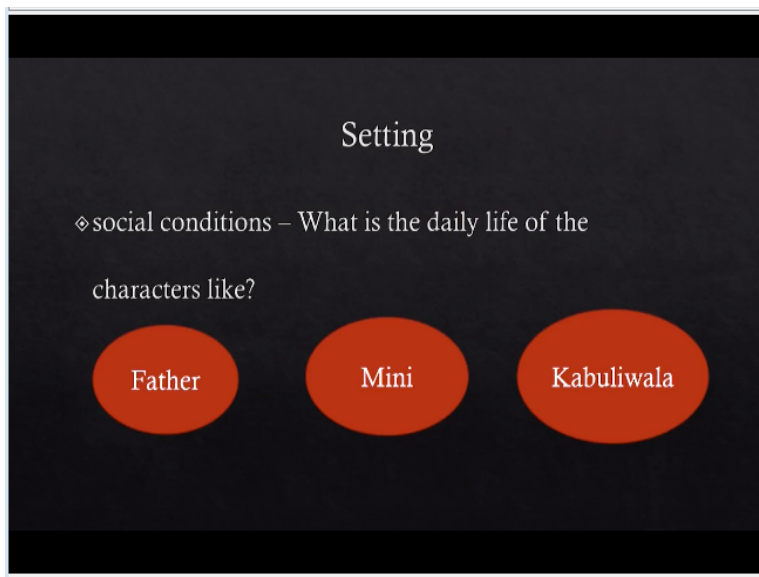
So, the very interesting image of immobility and we can see that he has become mind traveler in some ways just like a writer. So, there are thematic associations between the father and this stranger from Kabul, as I said there is an association resemblance between the writer.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:00)



The writer who is also the father of Mini and the Kabuliwala from a strange country both of them are stuck in place by the end of the story not only the writer father. But also the Kabuliwala and they start to wonder imaginatively both of them and that is very interesting how one comes to develop as the other.

(Refer Slide Time: 14:29)

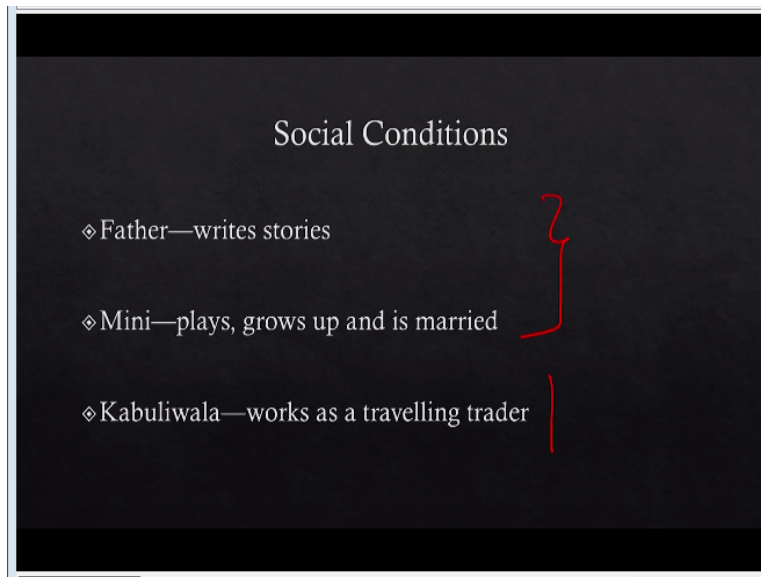


Now setting is also about the social conditions of the characters in a fictional world, so the question that one can ask is this. What is the daily life of the characters like in a particular story, so if you look at Kabuliwala what is the father do, what is Mini do, what is the Kabuliwala do, on a daily basis. Now let us see what they do, the father writes a story, he is a writer. He

occasionally steps out the house to do some business in the city probably business related to the running the household.

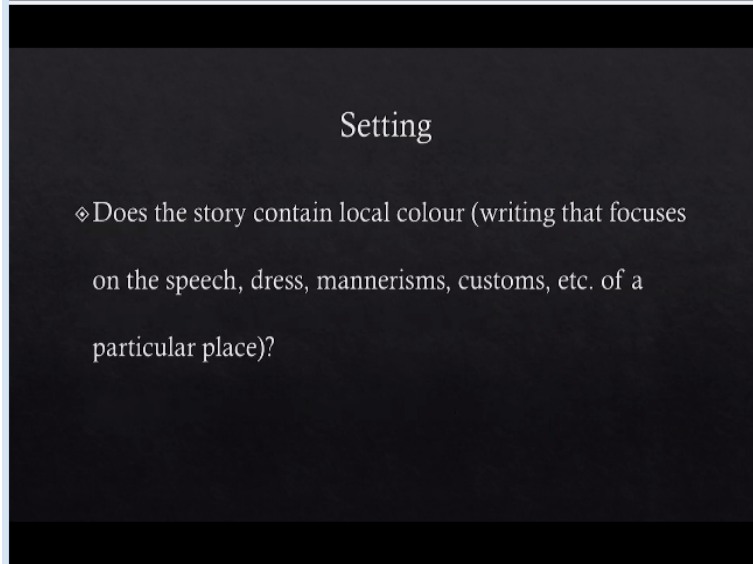
But basically his profession is about writing fiction how about Mini what exactly she does, this girl plays, this girl chatters with her companions older and younger and she grows up and she is married at the end of the story that is what she does.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:14)



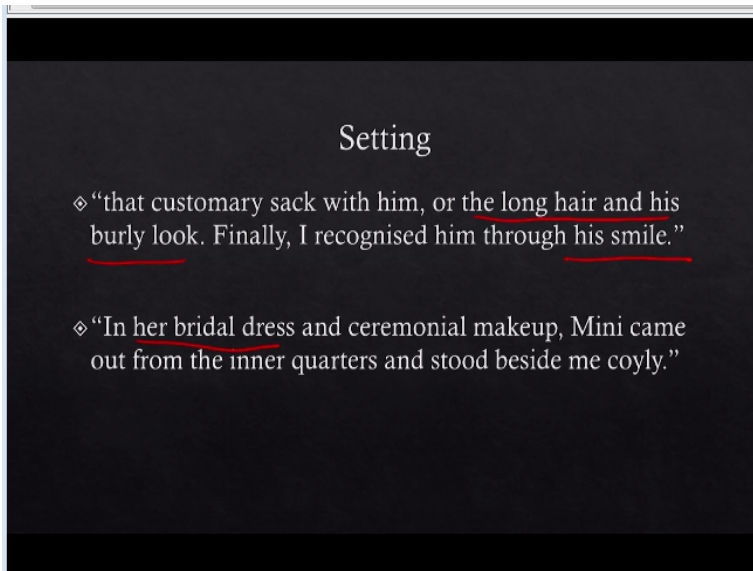
And the Kabuliwala what is he do, he is the one who is very very mobile in the sense that he moves about the city selling staff, selling things and he is a travelling trader. So, he is business man in the real sense, so these are the social conditions of the various characters and the story. And their social conditions show the difference between the nature of their life style and conditions of life.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:55)



Now the other questions one might one to ask about the story are do they contain local color writing that focuses on the speech, or dress, or mannerisms, customs etc. of a particular place. So, that is the important question to ask in the context of the Kabuliwala.

(Refer Slide Time: 16:16)



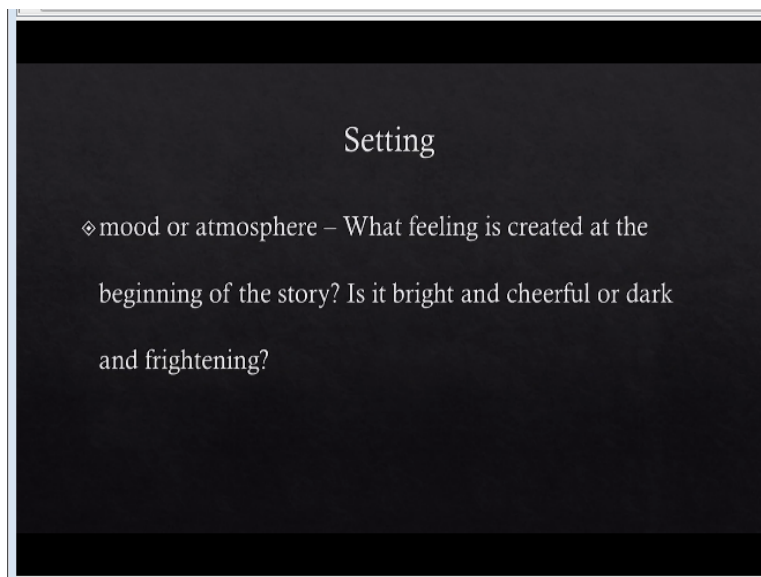
We had a look at the customary objects that he carries especially the sack that is always with him or the long hair or the burly looks. So, these are some of the mannerisms the demeanor of the character that establishes particular identity of the person inspire interesting that at the end of the story. You when Kabuliwala returns from jail and he visits Mini’s house the father is unable to recognize him.

Because he has drastically at 8 years in jail with would definitely do that to that particular character. And the father says that very interestingly are recognized him through hi smile. Because that customary sack is not with him and he does not have the long hair or the burly look only his smile is the one human thing that kind of connects or reminds the father about the bond he had with the stranger 8 years ago.

So, the descriptions certainly are very important to creating narrative and emotional impacts on the reader. And let us look at another character whose dress is described in the story and that is Mini. And the first description happens at the end of the story, when she is in her bridal dress that is very interesting. So, we have the Kabuliwala whose buggy clothes and physical appearance or constantly reference, unlike the other characters such as Mini or the father.

And as I said Mini's description is down especially her dress is reference the type of dress that she wears is reference only at the end of the story when she is in her bridal dress and ceremonial makeup. And she comes out from the inner quarters and stood beside me coyly, so these are very interesting things that add to the emotional intensity of her narrative.

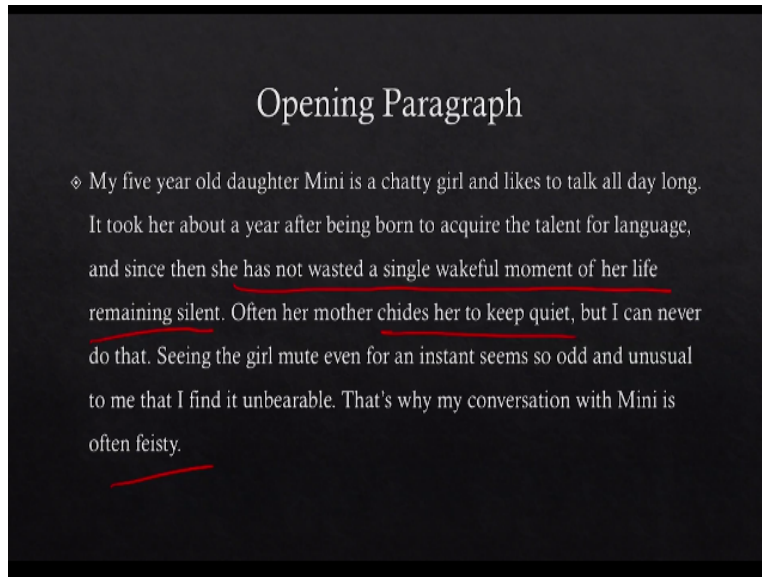
(Refer Slide Time: 18:29)



The other question that we can ask ourselves is about mood or atmosphere, what are the feelings that are created at the beginning of the story is the story bright and cheerful or dark and frightening are any way in between on this spectrums. So, these questions will help as

understand the various layers that are they in a story in terms of it is themes or central meanings. This is how the story begins this is the opening paragraph of the story and let see what kind of mood does it create on the reader.

(Refer Slide Time: 19:11)



My 5 year old daughter Mini is a chatty girl and likes t talk all day along it took her about a year after being born to acquire the talent for language, and since then she has not wasted a single wakeful moment of a life remaining silent often her mother chides her to keep quite but I can never do that, seeing the girl mute even for an instant seems so odd and unusual to me that I find it unbearable that’s why my conversation with Mini is often feisty.

Now this is very interesting opening paragraph and this particular phrase, she has not wasted a single wakeful moment of her life remaining silent is an exaggeration which adds to the light tone. The cheerful tone of the story, so it definitely would bring a smile to the reader and of course it is about 5 year old girl and loquacious 5 year little girl is also very very interesting and attractive figure.

And we have a contrast here slight bursting of the bubble there through the figure of the mother who chides her to keep quiet. So, things are balanced here the light atmospheres balanced by a slightly negative touch through the figure of the mother, who wants the child to keep quiet like a good modest little girl. But the father can never do that, so the father is very indulgent.

So we see a nice balance here between the 2 parent figures seeing the girl mute even for an instant seems, so odd and unusual to me that I find it unbearable that is why my conversation with Mini is feisty, again the word feisty very spirit kind of lift the mood of the first paragraph of the story, back to the cheerful tone. So, there is an as I said nice checks and balances here in this particular opening paragraph okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 21:10)

Frightening Moment

- ◆ Violence of the Kabuliwala
- ◆ Obscene language

Rahamat was in the midst of hurling abuse in obscene language at the dishonest man when Mini came running out of the house, shouting, 'Kabuliwala, O Kabuliwala.'

In a flash, Rahamat's face was filled with expressions of happiness.

There is a frightening moment in the story and that is associated with the Kabuliwala, he is the only figure in this story who is violent and who employs of seen language in this story and this particular context is. So, when Rahamat is arrested because he has attacked a man who refused to pay up after having bought a shawl he attacks the man and he employs of seeing language and when Mini hears about the commotion and comes out of the house.

He is demeanor his behavior changes in a flash Rahamat face was filled with expressions of happiness. So, the moment where we kind of comes and contact with the child his rough his violent behavior completely undergoes a change, that is something we need to keep in mind about this particular character.

(Refer Slide Time: 22:11)

Closing Paragraph

◇ "I had to cut out one or two items from the éclat of the festivities for gifting that money. For example, the lighting decoration was not as gorgeous as I had wanted it to be, and the band party had to be cancelled. This upset the women, but buoyed by a benevolent spirit, my auspicious ceremony became more luminous."

Metaphorically
lighted up

And now let us closing paragraph and look at the tone of this particular paragraph. The narrator says I had to cut out 1 or 2 items from the éclat of the festivities for gifting that money. For example, the lighting decoration was not as gorgeous as I had wanted it to be, and the band party had to be cancelled. This upset the women, but buoyed by a benevolent spirit, my auspicious ceremony became luminous.

So, this is the moment in the story when the writer father becomes completely sympathetic towards the state of the Kabuliwala and he wants to help him monitorarily financially. So, what he does is from the butted he has for his daughter's wedding, he takes out particular some of money and offers it to the man the stranger from Kabul and that generous act has an impact on the festivities that he had planned for his daughter.

For example the lighting decoration was not as beautiful as he had planned it to be and he had to cancel the music party, the band party and the women were not best pleased with this new arrangements. But the father was lifted by a benevolent generous spirit and his auspicious ceremony became more brighter. So, metaphorically the festivity has become light up more beautifully than ever before.

So, this is a very interesting paragraph and you can see that just as in the opening paragraph there is a combination of positive and negative tortures to it. So, he had to cut out remove 1 or two

aspects from the wedding party, so that is the negative touch. But having done that and he gets this benevolence spirit back.

Because he has done that he feels that is auspicious the ceremony has become more luminous more you know effective somehow or the other. And that the wedding of his daughter would be even greatly blessed, so this combination of pluses and minus is the theme that seems to run through the entire story even in the previous episode about the frightening moment in the story.

The Kabuliwala is violent his using at scene language but the moment Mini enters the scene that to this character is surprised and Rahamat's face is filled with expressions of happiness. So, that is the positive and the negative there about that particular character. Now how do we evaluate the story ultimately if we look at the conclusion of the story especially the last paragraph.

We see that the authority of the father is asserted because he has the power to take out of few items from the wedding events that he had planned. He has the authority to call his daughter who is somewhere else in the house. You know getting rest for the wedding and this kind of authority is something that is underlined in the story. And while he is the protector of Mini the daughter his own daughter.

He is also the protector of the Kabuliwala another father figure with whom he empathizes with at the end of the story. And that Kabuliwala is also as I said a father of a daughter like Mini and the last wonder I want to stress here is that women are ignored at every point in this story. And it we should know that they are not major characters here we just have Mini and Mini's mother as a roles in this story.

And Mini's mother please a very very marginal role and Mini herself though she occupies a centre stage at the beginning of the story. She becomes less important as the story progresses and the father's thoughts his reactions his emotions and that of Kabuliwala's occupy the centre stage so to speak. So, women are ignored but they are reasonably show because if we notice that the women would have wanted the band party, the lighting decoration.

Because they do not know the importance that the Kabuliwala had played in their life and again if you go back to that opening paragraph the mother who wants to suppress the child's spirit is also not betrayed in a very very positive light. So, ultimately this story asserts the authority of the father and makes father figures very very empathetic and sympathetic, thank you for watching I will continue in the next lecture.