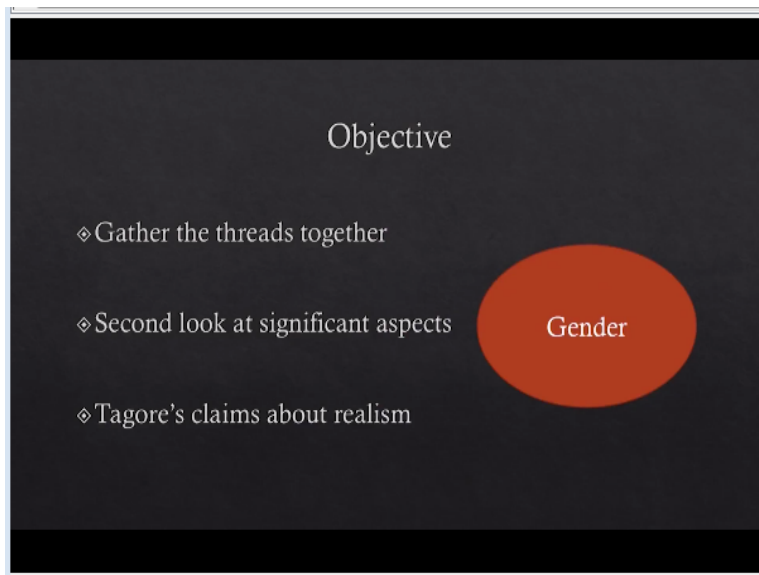


Short Fiction in Indian Literature
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Indian Institute of Technology-Madras

Lecture-3D
Realism, Gender in Tagore's Kabuliwala

Hello and welcome to this lecture on realism and Gender in Tagore's Kabuliwala okay.

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The objective of this lecture are these, my point is to get the all the threads of this short story analysis that I have done so far over this week. Secondly I would like to take another good look at some of the significant arguments that I have made over the course of this stories analysis. And finally I want to talk about Tagore's claims about realism in the context of his short stories.

And finally I would also like to talk about the issues related to Gender in this particular short story Tagore has is very interesting remark to make about realism in his short stories when critics suggest that they are more lyrical than realistic Tagore has this comment to make.

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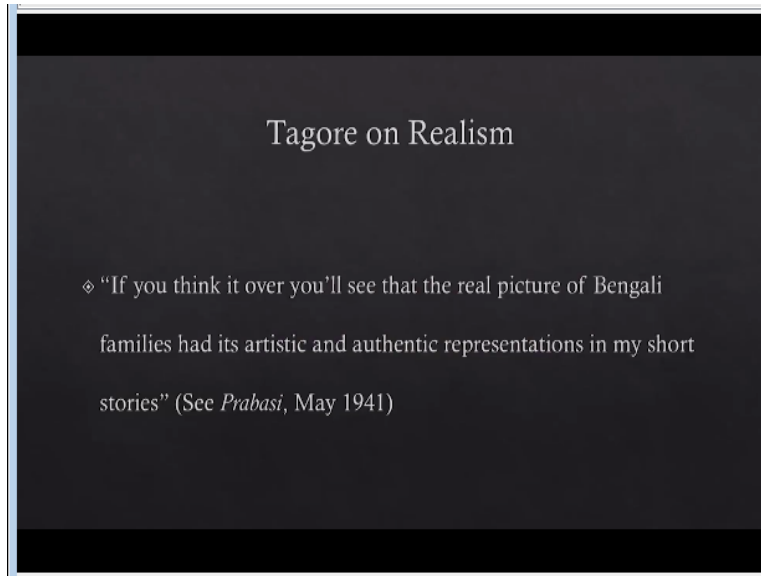
Tagore on Realism

◊ “I am surprised when you say that my short stories are lyric in appeal...I'd like to emphasise that there was never any want of realism in them. I've written what I have seen, deeply felt and directly experienced.” (See *Prabasi*, May 1941)

He says I am surprised when you say that my short stories are lyric in appeal. I had like to emphasize that there never was I would like to emphasize that there was never any want of realism in them. I have written what I have seen deeply felt and directly experienced. So, we can see a nice contrast building here the contrast is between lyric the contrast is between lyric and realism for him apparently being very lyrical does not mean being very realistic.

Therefore he suggest that his short stories are more realistic than lyrical in nature and he asserts that whatever has been written in his fiction has been deeply felt in directly experience through his observation of human nature. So, this is very interesting claim to make in the context of Tagore's short stories and he goes on to say that if you think it over.

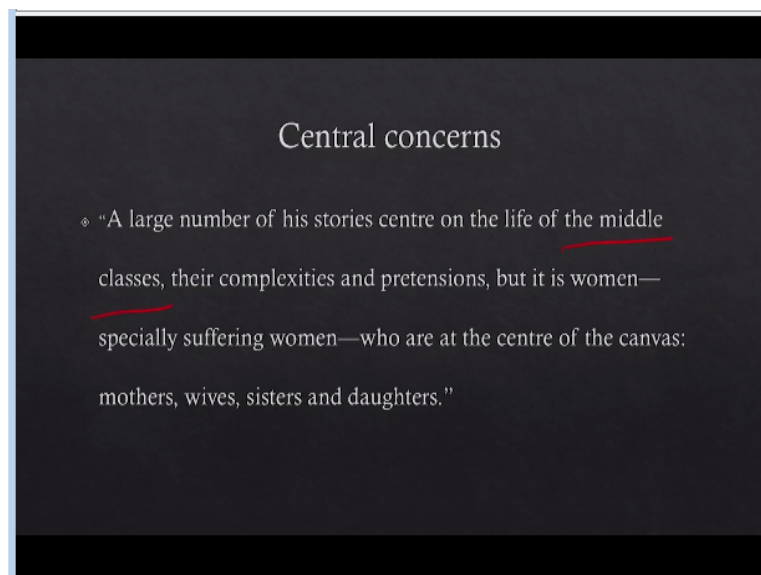
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You will see that the real picture of Bengali families had it is artistic and authentic representations in my short stories. He makes this massive claim that the middle classes especially the Bengali middle classes have been very adequately represented in his short fiction. It is as if he is the creator in the sense that he is the first one to represent Bengali families in his short fiction.

Now if we put these claims of Tagore alongside some of the criticisms that have been written about his fiction.

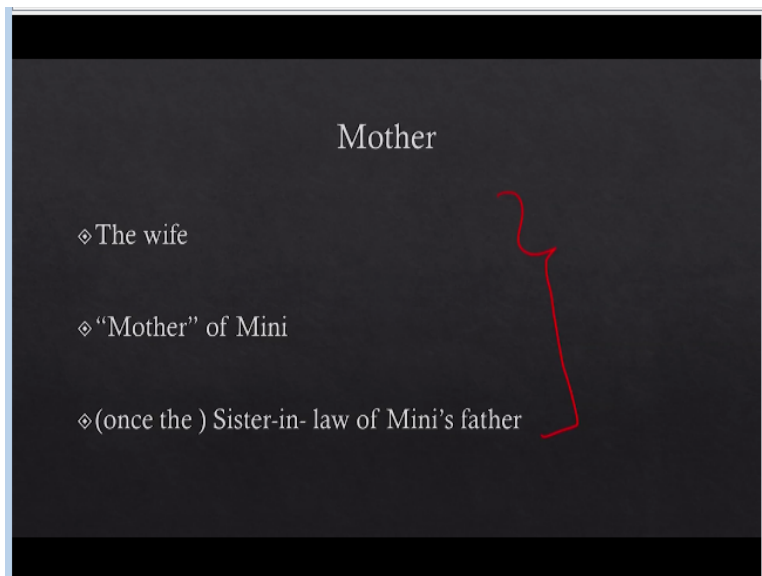
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We get some very interesting observations one such critic mentions that large number of stories centre on the life of the middle classes. If we go back to that earlier comment made by Tagore, he says that he has captured Bengali families as a whole, but here we have another critic suggesting that it is the middle classes that way especially represented by Tagore in his fictions.

So, a large number of short stories centre on the life of the middle classes their complexities and pretensions. But it is women especially suffering women who are at the centre of the canvas, mothers, wives, sisters and daughters. Let see how this observation is realized in the context of the Kabuliwala quite shortly.

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Now I have touched upon the character of the mother within course of Mini in the Kabuliwala in my earlier sessions now I would like to take another look at this representation of the mother of Mini once again before we rap up our analysis of the short story. So, she is the wife of the writer narrator of the story and she is also the mother of Mini. But there is a slight hesitation as to whether there is a slight doubt on the minds of the readers as to whether she is the biological mother of this little girl Mini.

And that his doubt has been put in our minds, in the minds of the readers by the author narrator himself at the very beginning of the story if you recall Mini asks this very innocent question who is mom to you. And he kind of reflex in his mind that cheers the sister-in-law but he does not

spelt it out to his little daughter. And he tells it to go out and play with Bola. So we know that this current wife and the mother of Mini has been once the sister-in-law of Mini's fathers.

So, this is sister-in-law apparently has become the wife we can assume that the first wife has had died and she has assumed that position in regard to the writer, narrator of the story. So, she occupies a really interesting position in the context of this interesting family father, daughter and mother she occupies a liminal status in the sense that she is the wife as well as she has been once the sister-in-law.

So, this ambiguity is very very interesting in the identity of the wife of the father, the wife of the writer, narrator in the story. She is also apparently young this wife of the writer and she is very terrified of the public fear at one point in this story we see the writer mention the numerous things that his wife is terrified about in this world ranging from hawkers on the street to drunkest to the European soldiers as well. So, there is a range of things that can frighten this young wife.

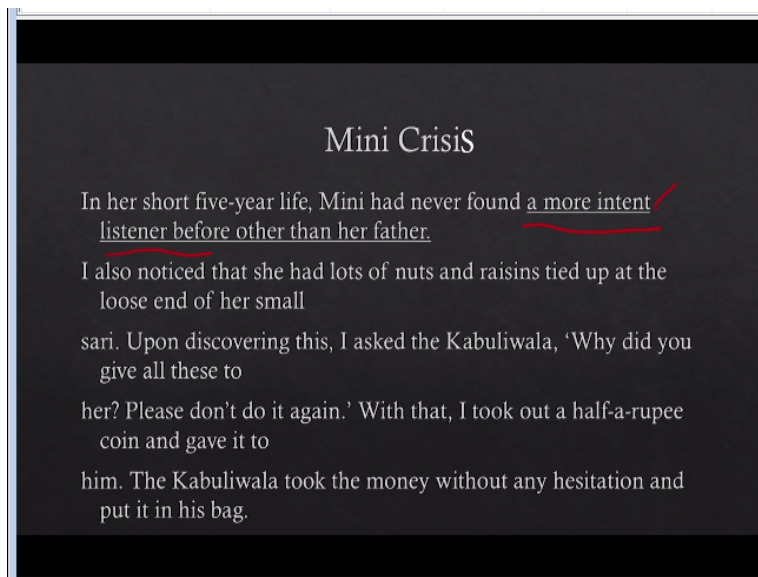
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And the other very interesting thing to notice about this young wife or the mother of Mini is the fact that she constantly disciplines the daughter. And obviously we have also noted that she is terribly suspicious of the Kabuliwala. She fears that this man from Afghanistan might one they kidnap her daughter and taken away. So, all these things are quite noticeable about the young wife/mother of Mini.

But what is not mentioned in the story and that is very very interesting is that how love of Mini is not narrated it is not narrated. And it is not mentioned by the author it is not mentioned by the writer, narrator of this story and that absent is particularly noticeable. If we think deeply about her position within this narrator. I can give you very interesting analysis hopefully of an excerpt in this story let us taken look at this extended excerpt.

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Because it gives as several interesting information undulation to the father and undulation to his wife as well and in turn about the Kabuliwala, so the father says in her short five-year life, Mini had never found a more intent listener before other than her father. So, here there is a reference to the Kabuliwala who has come to occupy the attention of this little girl and the father is surprised by that fact.

Because so for it is the father who has occupied the entire attention of this little girl, now it is the new person in this in this in her life who is the Kabuliwala who occupies that precision in her attention. I also noticed that she had lots of nuts and raisins tied up at the loose end of her small sari. Upon discovering this, I asked the Kabuliwala, 'why did you give all these to her? Please do not do it again with that I took out a half-a-rupee coin and gave it to him.'

The Kabuliwala took the money without any hesitation and put it in his bag. So, this incident is something that kind of tells us that the Kabuliwala is offering raisins and nuts without getting any benefit, financial benefit from that transactions. So, what he does get in turn is the heart of Mini. Because there is a very strong bond that emerges through this transaction that happens between the Kabuliwala and the little girl.

So, the father is not satisfied is not happy with the fact that the trader offers her nuts and raisins without getting money for it And he compensate that by giving him half-a rupee coin. Now if we go back to the earlier slide where this is this reference to this intent listener this statements are just that so for in whole life. The father has been the most attentive or keen listener to the charter to the conversation of Mini.

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The slide has a dark background with white text. At the top, the word 'Implications' is centered. Below it, there are two bullet points, each starting with a diamond symbol. The first bullet point is 'Was not her mother as a keen listener?' and the second is 'I asked the Kabuliwala, 'Why did you give all these to her?'. A red oval is positioned below the second bullet point, containing the text 'Mystery explained later' in white. On the right side of the slide, there are small navigation icons: a left arrow, a right arrow, and a refresh symbol.

Then the question obviously is was not her mother as a keen listener as her father that is the very interesting thing to ask because usually the mothers are the once who are really very close to young children especially little girls in the Indian context. So, why has the mother not been very keen listener is question or is the father not acknowledging the fact that the mother has been a keen listener to Mini.

So, these are some are the questions that crops up in a minds when we read that statement. I asked the Kabuliwala, “why did you give all these to her? The father asks the trader why did you

give all these to her and answer to that interesting question is given to ask at the end of the story. When the Kabuliwala tells the father and the readers that he has young child to an it is because of his memory of the little girl. He comes to visit the writer's house and has these friendly chats or conversations with the little child.

So, this passage has interesting and important information that will have an echo at the later stages of the story too. Now let us continue with that except so the father has given some money to the Kabuliwala for the raisins and nut. He has nuts that he has given to the girl. Now little bit later on returning home I found that a full scale row had broken out over the coin, holding the white round shining piece of metal in her hand.

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Mini Crisis

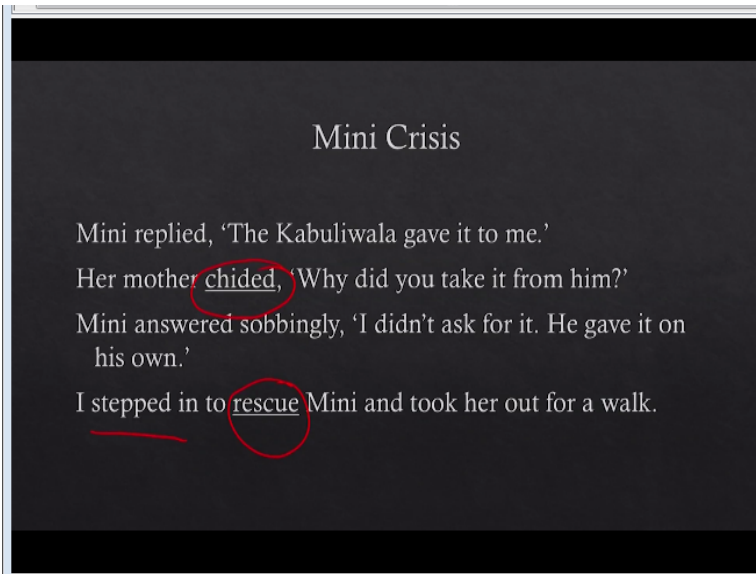
On returning home, I found that a full-scale row had broken out over the coin.

a noisy argument or fight

Holding the white, round, shining piece of metal in her hand, Mini's mother asked her in a rebuking tone, 'Where did you get the coin?'

Mini's mother asked her in a rebuking tone, where did you get the coin?

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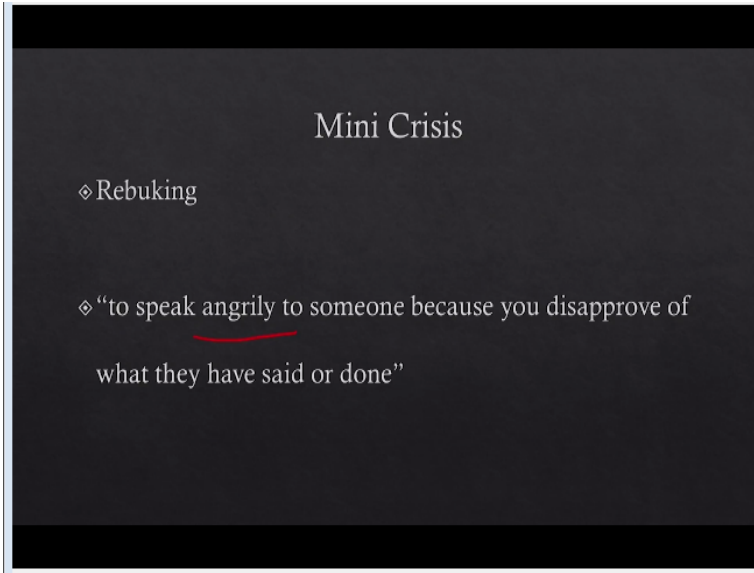


And Mini replied 'The Kabuliwala gave it to me', her mother chided, why did you take it from him? Mini answered sobbingly, I did not ask for it. He gave it on his own, I stepped in to rescue Mini and took her out for a walk. So, what is clear from this except is that the trader has return the coin to the little child. Why has does that is again a mystery which gets explain later on as I mentioned just now that he comes to this house.

And visits the little girl not because of financial motives that because of familiar desires to kind of have a relationship with the child who is more came to his on child back in Afghanistan, so he gives the coin back to Mini and he innocently takes the coin form him. And Mini's mother is very very upset and it is very interesting to note this particular phrase full scale row being use the context of in the context of enquiry between mother and a little daughter.

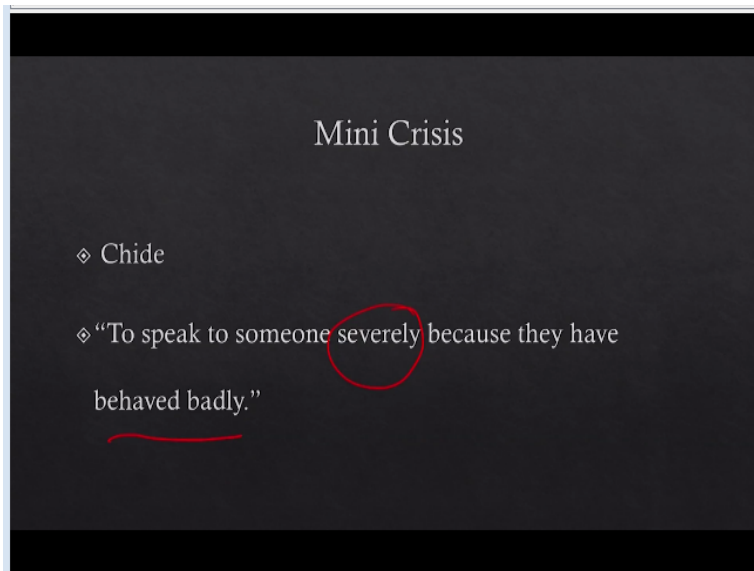
It is usually the doubts who have rows who have a noisy argument or a fight and that is the meaning of the word row noisy argument or a fight and to use this particular word in the context of kind of a minor issue in a household is very interesting. So, again other verse set of very interesting or rebuking and chided here.

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So, let us look at the words meaning rebuking means to speak angrily to someone because you disapprove of what they have said or done. So, there is real anger on the part of the mother of Mini, the young wife of the writer narrator of the story and again let us see what is the meaning of the word chide.

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Chide again means to speak to someone severely harshly because they have behaved badly so, the mother thinks that her daughter has behaved badly by accepting the coin from the Kabuliwala stranger fruit peddler and alien to that social environment. Because this guy is from Kabul and he is visiting Calcutta to sell raisins and nuts and shawls and other things.

So, to get coin from a man and that to stranger is something that is see mistake at least that is what the mother thinks it is very interesting to see that the father does not put in any word here in the context of the mini cruisers that is happening here between the little girl. And the mother uh he has not put in even a single word instead what he does is, he steps in to rescue Mini.

And he takes her out for a walk he simply just takes this little girl out of that situation literally and he brings her out of the house for a walk. So, we need to wonder about this absence of a contribution in this serious dialogue that si going on between the child and the mother.

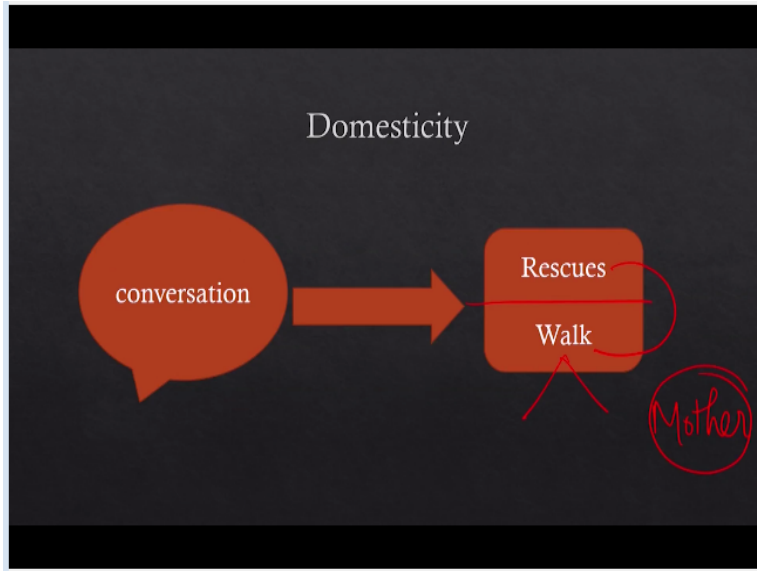
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This is not the only context where we here about the young mother being very severe towards her little daughter. If we recall the very first paragraph of the short story the father says that often her mother chides her to keep quiet. But I can never do that so, there is a contrast that is drawn between the father and the mother figure of Mini one is very severe the other is indulgent.

And why does she chide Mini she wants her to keep quiet like a little good girl girls are not supposed to be very very talkative. It is really bad for their characters so, the mother disciplines her she socially and culturally disciplines little child. And the father does not agree to that now as I mention before there is hardly any conversation happening between the two parents in the context of their raising of the little child Mini.

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So, instead of having a dialogue with either the daughter or his wife he just as I mention before takes her out of that environment. And that results in walk in which the two of them participate the father and the daughter participate and the mother is left out of that space.

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And that is very interesting think to notice as well keeping all these suggestive ideas in mind one can safely speculate and say that this family this house has dysfunctional domesticity there does not seem to be healthy dialogue or conversation between the members of the family one parent is very intelligent while the other parent is totally the opposite.

And the story does not give us any glimpse of a crossly domestic atmosphere where the three of the family members come together and exchange entamassy. So, one can sum up and say that this is a dysfunctional domesticity and this is not the only dysfunctional domesticity mentioned in the story Kabuliwala. We should also remember that is functional domesticity of the fruit peddler as well the Kabuliwala who has come away from home, verse left his family behind.

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The five year-old girl is free, she is free to work in where if she wants she is free to work in into her father's studio or studies. She is free to make remarks about the domestic help that is in her family, in her household she has friendship with the Sentry with Bhola perhaps, he is also a domestic health. And she also makes friends with the size Nabi uh whose the man who takes care of the houses in the family.

So, this five year-old girl is very free to enjoy herself and there are no restrictions pleased on her behavior and her comments except occasionally by the mother.

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Mini

◇ And the way Mini's inconstant little heart behaved was embarrassing even to her father. She easily forgot her old friend and found a new one in Nabi, the syce. Then, as she continued to grow up, she replaced all her elderly male friends, one after another, with girls of her own age. She was hardly to be seen in her father's studio. In a way, I had almost ended all friendship with her."

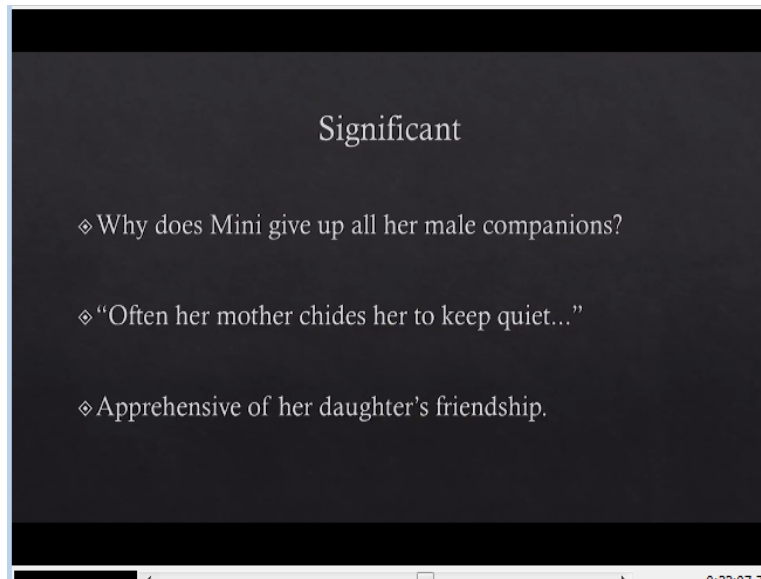
Now this little girl disappears quiet soon and let us see how exactly that disappearance happens this I should correct and say the freedom that this little girl enjoyed in the household also kind of takes different air and this is the comment that her own father had to make about her change in attitude. So, we need to remember that once the Kabuliwala is arrested.

And he leaves this domestic space of Mini, Mini also grows up and remember the Kabuliwala is away for quiet a good number of years almost 8 years and fact and in that duration many out grows her childish attitude. And she becomes young adult and the father has this very interesting judgment to make about her character. And the way Mini's inconstant little heart behaved was embarrassing even to her father.

She easily forgot her old friend and found a new one in Nabi, the Syce. Then as she continued to grow up, she replaced all her elderly male friends, one after another, with girls of her own age. She was hardly to be seen in her father's studio. In a way, I had almost ended all friendship with her to the 5 year-old girl is gone. And one she is gone she is termed as inconstant because she has even a replaced her father with girls of her own age in terms of the friendships that she has formed.

So, the father says that he has almost ended all friendship with her the questions that we need to ask firstly why does Mini give up all her male companions what compelled her to do so.

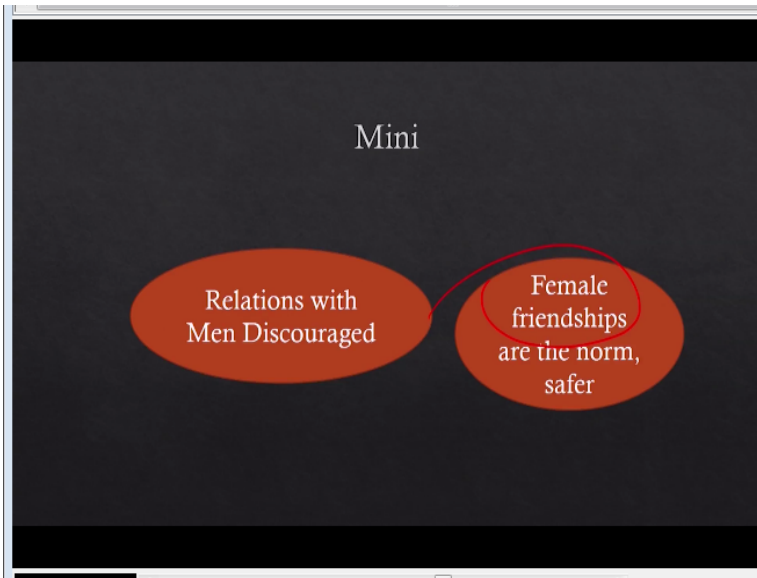
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So, we need to think about the social context of this particular short story the period in which it was written. And the gender identities that were created and constructed and reinforced in every aspect of society. And we need to remember even within the compass of this particular story, the mother of in chides her to keep quiet. And she we have to remember that praise apprehend of her daughter’s friendship with the male fruit seller from abroad.

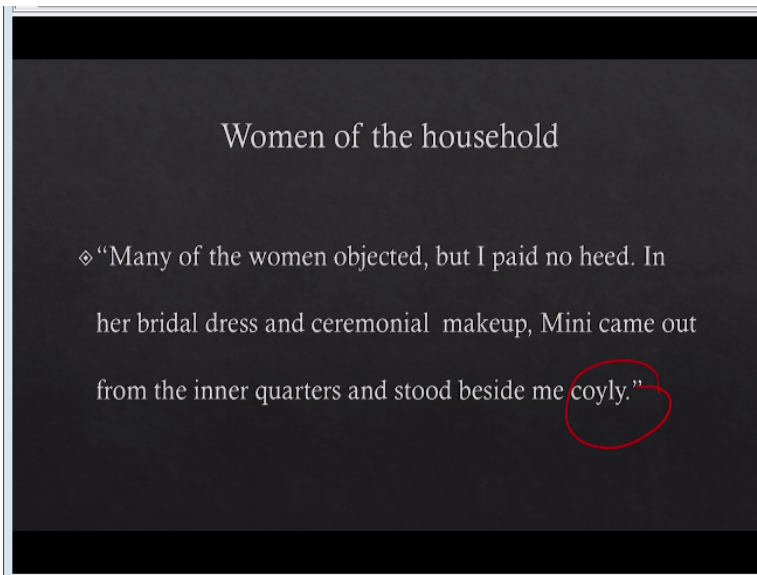
So, all these things are minor queues for us to pick up and kind of construct world out of these little puzzles. And understand that the daughter is being constantly disciplines sickly by the women folk around her which is probably why she has given up all her male companions. So, there is some kind of social disciplining happening in the sub text of the story of which the father is unaware of either unconsciously. We do not know but he does not seem to be aware of all these trajectories are ongoing in the world of his daughter.

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So, relationships with men are discouraged that is the safe assumption that we can make in the context of Mini which is why she gives up all her friendships with the men in her society instead she goes for the female friendships which are the norm. And which are the safe spaces for her to be in.

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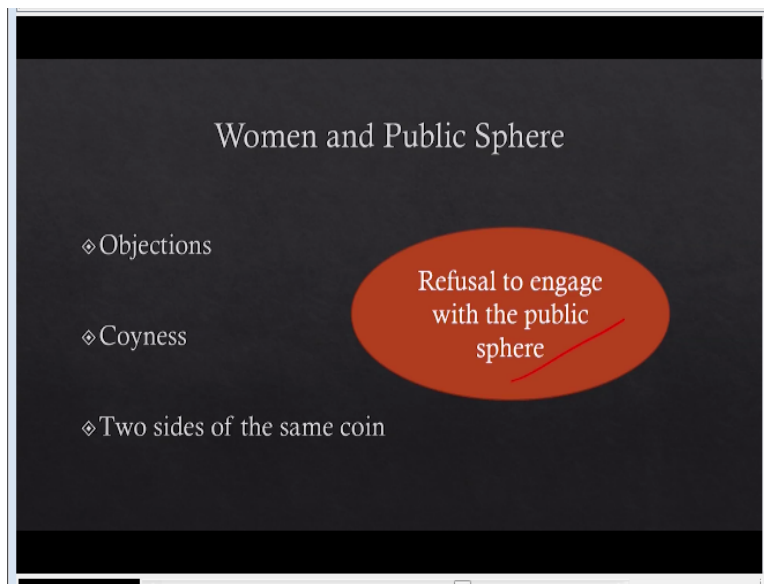


We need to also take another look at the women of the household there are several women. But none of them are mention by name even the mother of Mini does not get a name, if we recall this particular fact which is very interesting. So, the women of the household object to the behavior of the head of the household who is the writer, narrator of the story. So, this except is taken from the end of the story.

When the father puts down his foot and uses the authority and calls Mini from somewhere in the house getting ready for the wedding. And he calls her because he wants her to meet her old friend Kabuliwala who has come back from the jail to be her of friendly visit. So, the women of the household objectives to the bright being called before the wedding to see some stranger.

But I paid no heed in how bridal dress and ceremonial make up Mini came out from the inner quarters and stood beside me coyly. This is the word that I find interesting in this reading of this except in this session.

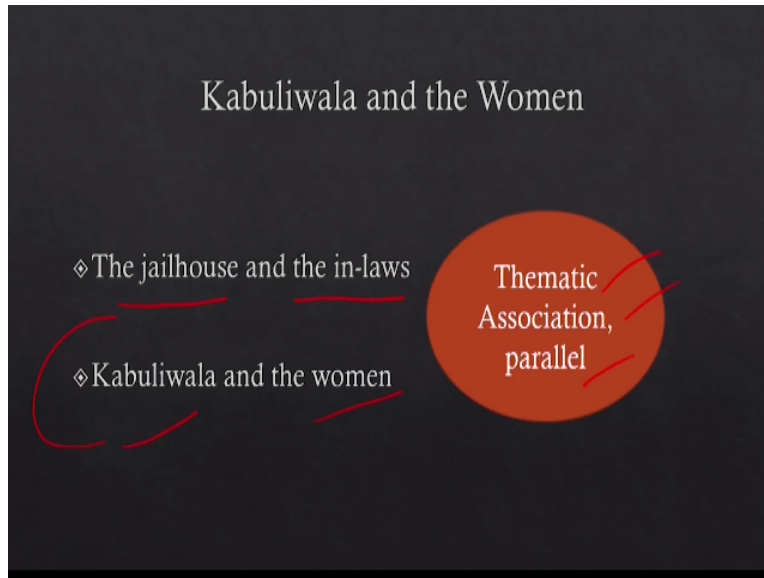
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Because Objections that the women and the coyness of Mini are two sides of the same coin, I would argue because these attitudes are something to do with women's refusal to engage with the public sphere. And the public sphere here is this space the studies space the space where the father occupies and does writing. And where we have the visitors waiting to meet Mini.

So, they can refused to engage women can refused to engage with the public sphere by either objecting to it valuably are being very shy either way they are objections either way they are refusal to engage in a sphere that they think is not theirs.

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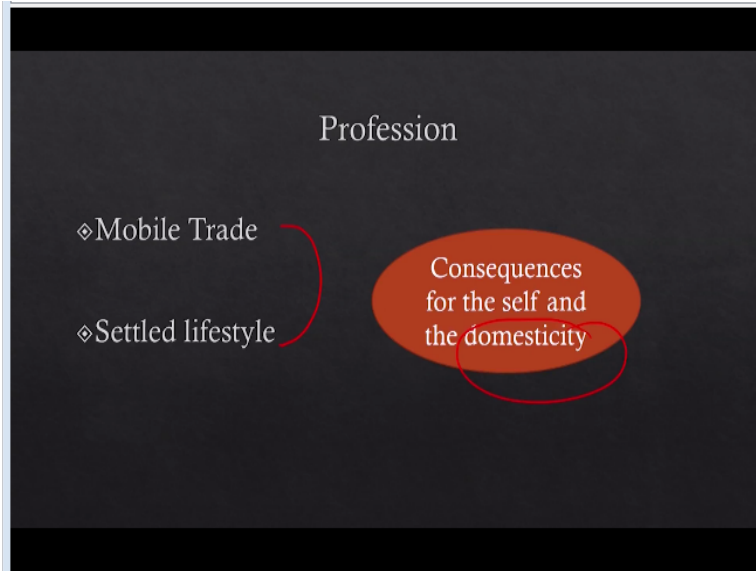


Now let me look at the parallels between Kabuliwala the stranger the other the exotic former and the women. And let us see how and what ways are these two categories similar or mirror each other. Now if we look at this idea of the jail house and the in-laws both of them have a similarity in the sense that they are very restrictive of the freedom that the occupant of these spaces have.

So, the jailhouse does not let the prisoner move out of it is space and the in-law space also does not let the bride step out of it without due permission. So, in this sense there is a parallel between the jailhouse and the in-laws space especially in relation to an occupant who is occupying a inferior or a weak position. So, there is a thematic association or parallel here.

Now if we have this parallel mind the Kabuliwala and the women of the household are also equally powerless. The Kabuliwala goes to jail and he waits on the authority of the you know higher authorities in the prison house and the women in the household of the writer narrator also have to given to the demands of the head of the household and in this case it is the father of Mini. So, there are certain interesting thematic associations between these 2 categories of people.

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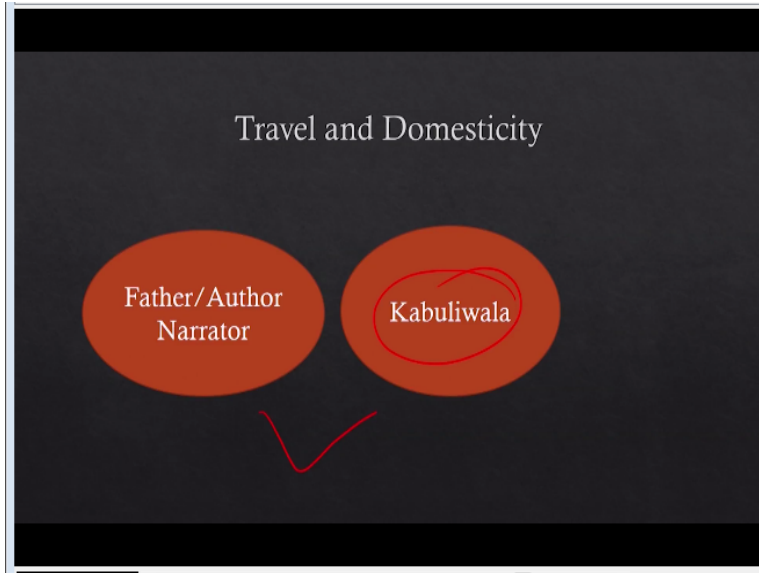


Now I want to look at the professional context of the Kabuliwala. Now he performs a trade which involve a lot of mobility and this is in stark contrast to the settle lifestyle of the father of Mini who is an aristocrat and a writer an aristocrat and a writer do not have to be very mobile all they need to do is sit in the particular space and look up the accounts or a just to minimal supervisions and in the case of the writer is just work in a very isolated space.

So, these professions have certain consequences for identity formation. Now and it also the nature of the profession also affects the nature of the domesticity I just mentioned a little while ago that the Kabuliwala also has a dysfunctional domesticity. Because the nature of his profession keeps and out of his home and therefore he is unable to contribute to the domesticity, the happy domesticity in within his home.

So, it is interesting to see the way the profession has an impact on familial life and if we also recall the fact that even though this writer this narrator wants to step out of the house out of the country and do a lot of travel he does not do that. Because probably the motivation is to state closer that he can have some kind of settled domesticity with his little daughter.

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So, as I mentioned I just would like to sum up that point and say that the father slash of the narrator and the Kabuliwala both of them even though both of them have dysfunctional domesticities. The author the author figure in the story has the better domesticity than the Kabuliwala who hardly gets to see his daughter due to the nature of his profession which makes some travel way from his home and country.

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Gender

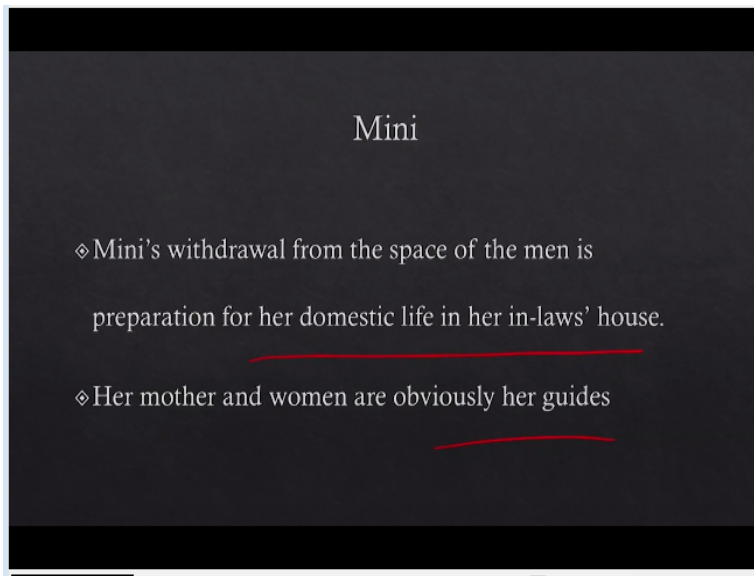
◊ "Under patriarchy, and in the cultural history of Bengal, a young girl's entry into her marital home denotes loss of freedom and surrender to household duties. It is a kind of incarceration out of which the girl can periodically emerge only if permitted to do so."

(Malashri Lal 6)

Now let me read out an interesting critic about gender, so according to Malashri Lal under patriarchy and in the cultural history of Bengal. A young girl's entry into her marital home denotes loss of freedom and surrender to household duties. It is a kind of incarceration an interesting word out of which the girl can periodically emerge only if permitted to do so.

So, this comment about the social conditions of life in Bengal immediately brings to mind the emerge of the jail house that is referred to in the story Kabuliwala. So, there as I said there are parallels between the domestic space and the space of prison in relation to the story that we have read for this week.

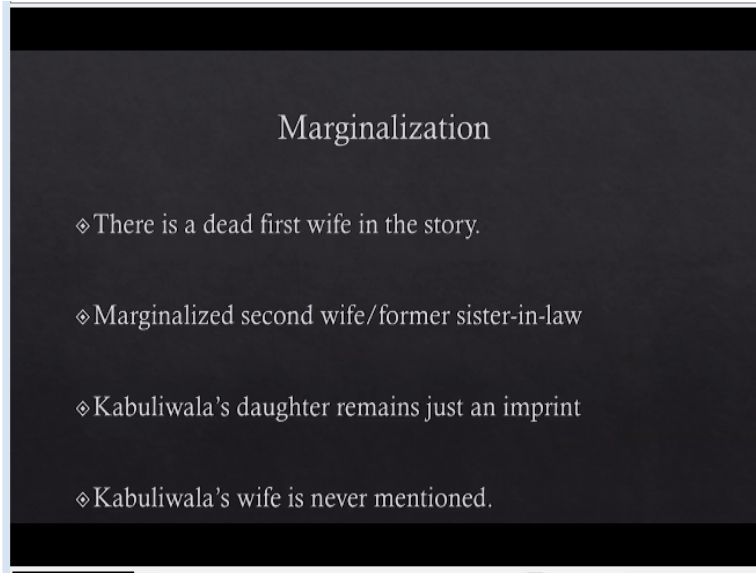
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So, if Mini withdraws from the space that she said with the male companions it is withdrawal that prepares for her domestic life in her in-laws home. So, that is the interesting thing about her refusal to engage with her male companions further because she wants to be appropriately trained for her future domesticity in her in-laws home. So, we need to kind of assume that her mother the really disciplinarian mother.

And the women of the household are obviously guiding her in this path in her preparation towards eh home that she is going to enter after her marriage.

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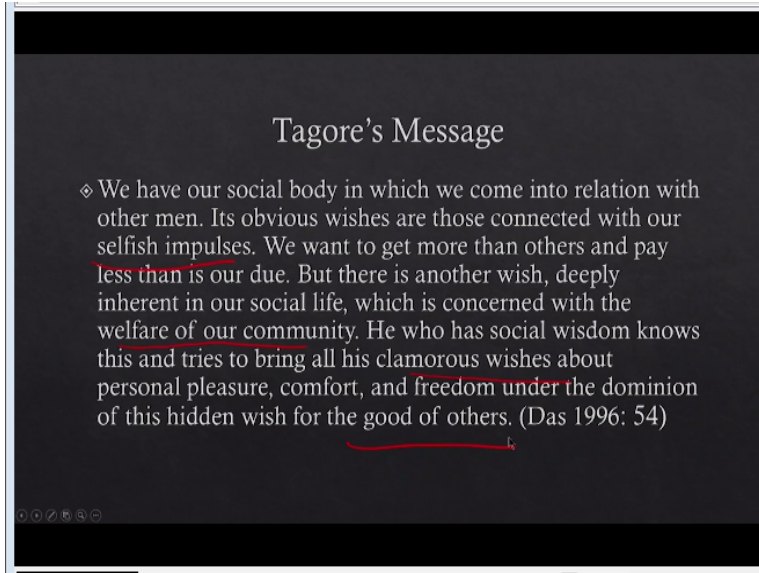


Now let me sum up the element of marginalization that is happening in relation to gender in the story. So, we need to remember that there is a dead first wife in the story. Because only when the first wife is dead we can assume that the father has married another has taken another wife the sister of the dead wife. Now we can also see that the second wife is marginalize to a greater extent.

Because we do not get to know enough information about this women all we get to know are the criticisms that she has to offer about Mini or her fears and other things. So, we do not get a whole some picture of the young wife the former's sister-law of Mini's father. And we also need to remember that the Kabuliwala's daughter remains just an imprint on a paper that he carries with him all along.

So, that daughter is also not flushed out we do not get to see her in the flush on the story scenes. And again the Kabuliwala's wife is never mention that is the interesting fact that we need to notice as well. So, all that he mentions is the daughter that he has left behind and for whose company that he longs and seeks to satisfy through his relationship with this little girl.

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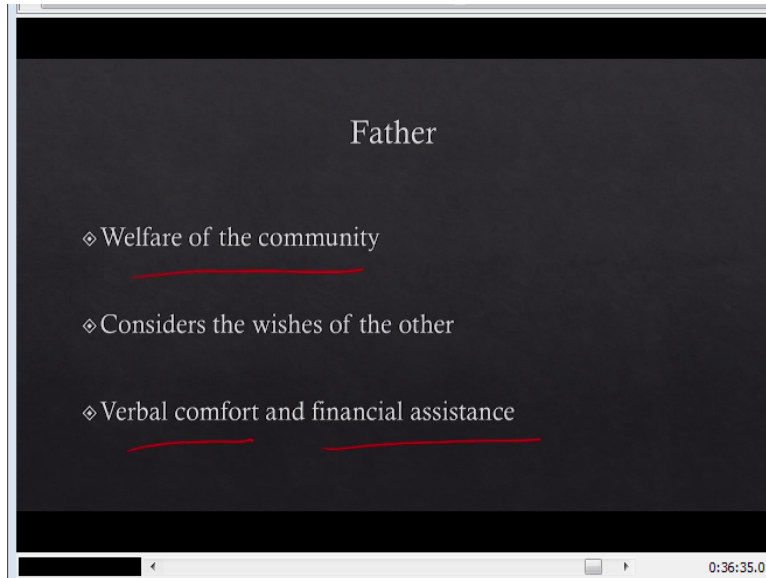


Now let us take a quick look at the message that Tagore has through his fiction it is a very interesting set of ideas in this except let us have a close look. We have our social body in which we come into relation with other men. It is obvious wishes are those connected with our selfish impulses, we want to get more than others and pay less than is our due. But there is another wish, deeply inherent in our social life, which is concerned with the welfare of our community.

He who has social wisdom knows this and tries to bring all his clamorous wishes about personal pleasure, comfort and freedom under the dominion of this hidden wish for the good of others. So, Tagore's message is pretty clear he says that many of his have selfish impulses we have a own personal pleasure to satisfy. We seek to get our own comfort, we are worried about only our own freedom.

But we can achieve greater good if we put the welfare of others before our own welfare that is the message he seeks to communicate through his fiction. Now let us put this certain ideas in just the position with this story that we have read for this week the Kabuliwala. So, what is the message that the father has to offer in his social life.

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We can see that the father puts the welfare of the community before his own and he prioritizes the welfare of the community more than his own personal wish. So, what he does is he offers not only verbal comfort to the Kabuliwala but also offers financial assistance and this real financial assistance which cuts into the budget of the wedding that he has planned for his daughter shows that he has concrete consideration for the welfare of the other who is the Kabuliwala in this case.

Because if you remember he cuts out certain aspects of the wedding celebrations for example the music party in order to offer financial assistance to the Kabuliwala. So that he can travel back to his home land and seek to reconnect with his daughter who must have grown just as Mini had, thank you for watching I will catch up with you in the next session