

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


Lecture-4
Plotting downfall in Khuswant Singh's "Karma"

Hello and welcome to this lecture on Khuswant Singh's short story karma, I have titled this lecture plotting downfall in Khuswant Singh's karma, so let see how exactly the downfall happens.

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Khuswant Singh

- ◊ Writer, journalist and diplomat
- ◊ Born in Punjab in 1915 and died in 2014 in New Delhi
- ◊ *Train To Pakistan* (1956), a novel on the partition of India in 1947



Now let me introduce this grand old man of letters Khuswant Singh, Khuswant Singh was a writer, a journalist and a diplomat. He was born in Punjab in British India in 1915 and he died into 2014 in free India in New Delhi, he is most well known for his novel train to Pakistan which was published first in 1956, this is a novel that was placed on the partisan of India in 1947.

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Khuswant Singh

- ◆ Essays *Not a Nice Man to Know* (1998)
- ◆ Short Stories *The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories* (1950)
- ◆ Autobiography *Truth Love and a Little Malice* (2002)

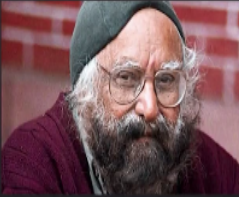
“Dry sense of humour”

He has also written a number of essays some of which were collected in a collection called not a nice man to know and it was published in 1998. And he has written numerous short stories too. And his first collection of short stories was a title the The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories and this collection was published in 1950 and his autobiography was titled Truth Love and a Little Malice and was published in 2002. He is known for his short width and a dry sense of humour.

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Khuswant Singh

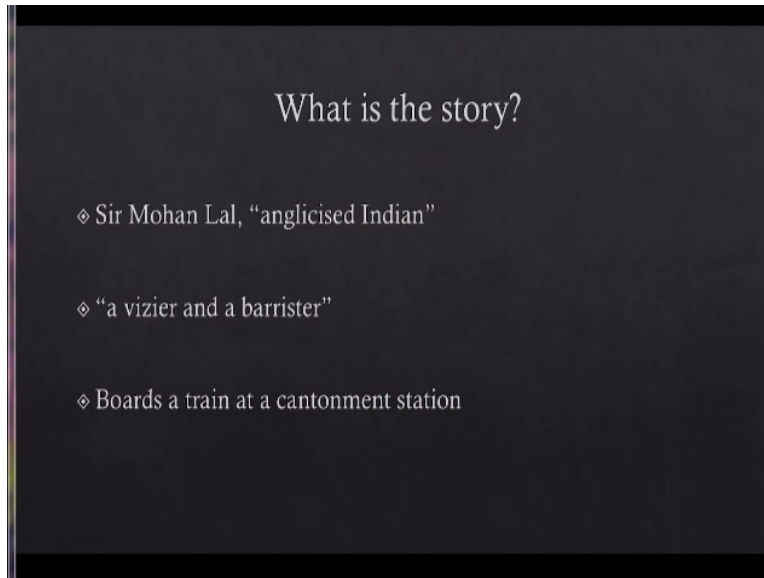
- ◆ Educated in England
- ◆ Practised law briefly
- ◆ A lover of the crossword puzzle



I have a few interesting snip out of information about Khuswant Singh and I called these pieces of information because they have a resonance with the central character of sir Mohan Lal in his short story karma and these are the details Khuswant Singh was educated in England just as sir Mohan Lal of karma was 2 and Khuswant Singh also practice law briefly and if you recall the

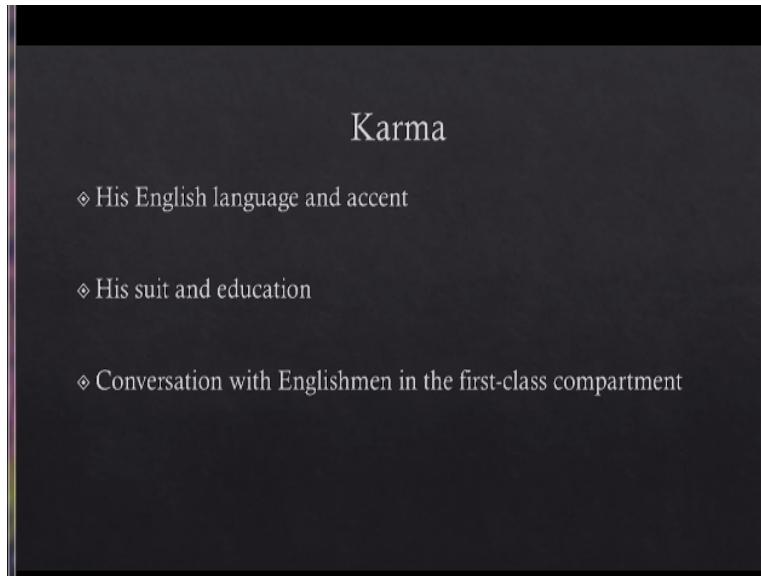
story of karma sir Mohan Lal was also a barrister. Khuswant Singh like sir Mohan Lal of karma is was a lover of the cross word bustle.

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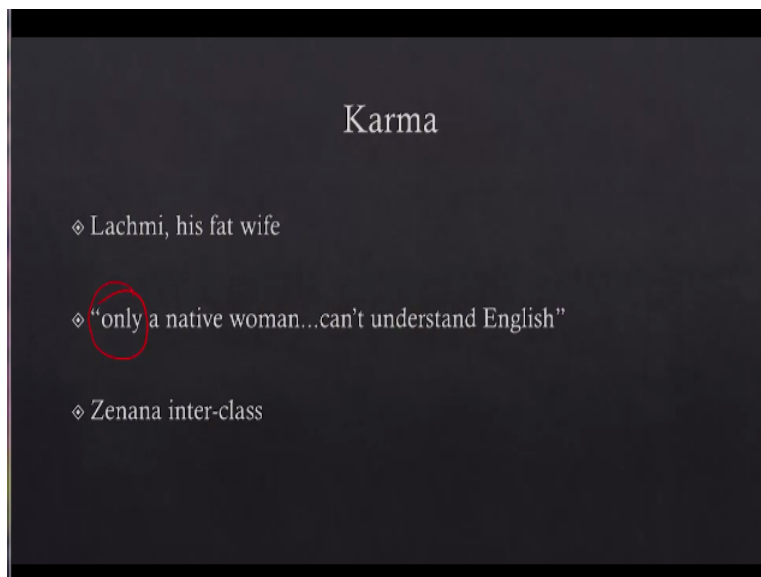
Now let us move on to the story world of karma, karma is about a man called sir Mohan Lal and he is an anglicised Indian, his wife tells us that he is a vizier and a barrister. And the story happens and the story starts at train station when sir Mohan Lal is in the first class waiting room and he is waiting to board a train and this station is at a cantonment an army base for British soldiers. And one thing we should remember about the story is that it is said in British India. So, India is not yet free and we have contributes presence of British soldiers British army persons in the country then.

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Now sir Mohan Lal is a man who is very very proud and what are the things that he is proud of, he is proud of his English language and accent. He is proud of a suit, that outfit that he is wearing and he is also very proud of his education his Oxford education and his education at the ins of temple in London, he has been called to the bar. And he is also very proud of another fact that he can converse very well just like an Englishman.

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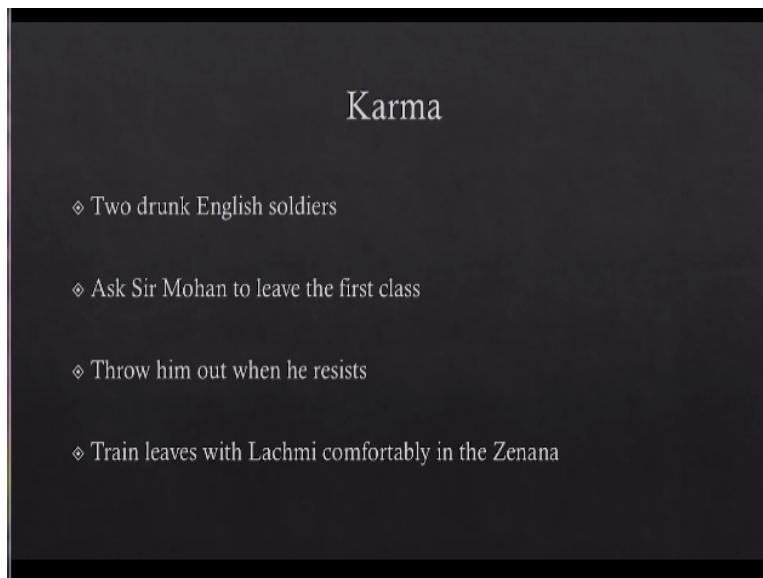


And he is looking forward to such conversations in the first class compartment that he is going to occupy. Sir Mohan Lal is travelling with his wife Lachmi and she is waiting outside of the first class compartment she is not using any waiting room like her husband and she is described as

very has being very fat and she herself describes her as a native women only a native women that is very interesting she is being very self conscious about that fat.

And she thinks that category is not something to be proud of and she says I am only a native women and I cannot understand English which is why I am not going to travel in the first class compartment with my husband. So, that is what she tells the coolie who is having a conversation with her outside the first class waiting room. So, she is going to travel in the Zenana interclass and not with her husband will come to the meaning of the Zenana interclass in a couple of minutes.

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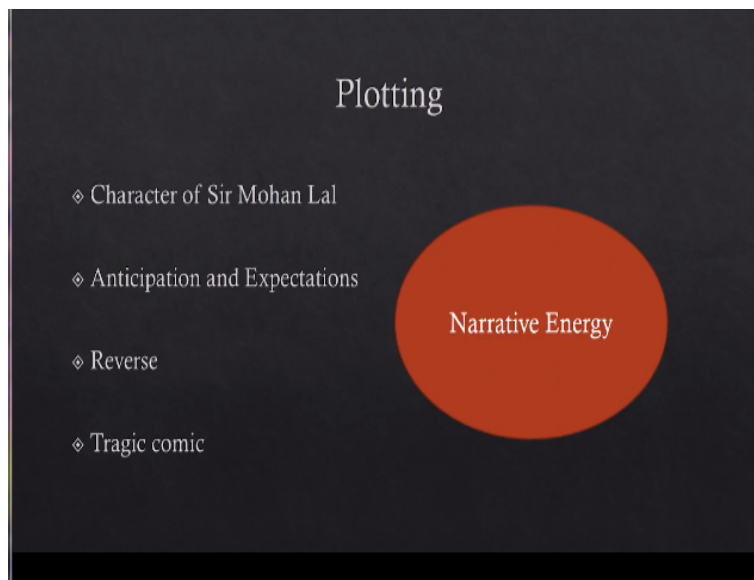


So, to pick up the trends of the story, so why happens is the train arrives at the station and sir Mohan Lal books the first class compartment and he is little bit disappointed to see that the compartment is empty he has been looking forward to some spirit at conversation with a couple of English gentleman. So, he is slightly cheated of that opportunity and then he seats himself and then he takes out his times newspaper which he has read several times by the way.

And he is waiting and then what happens is that a couple of drunk English soldiers look at a compartment and they get in, theoretically speaking they are not allow to be in the first class compartment. They are just ordinary English soldiers but then sir Mohan Lal thinks that if somebody in a questions there presence then he can step in and you know intercedes for them.

So, he is planning on being very very nice and gentleman lead to these English soldiers. But these 2 soldiers are drunk they are inebriated and they look at sir Mohan and they think that he is just an ordinary native and they want him out of the first class compartment. And they ask him but sir Mohan Lal refuses and then they physically and forcefully throw him out when he resists. And the train leaves with Lachmi the wife very comfortably seated in the Zenana interclass compartment, so that is the end of the story.

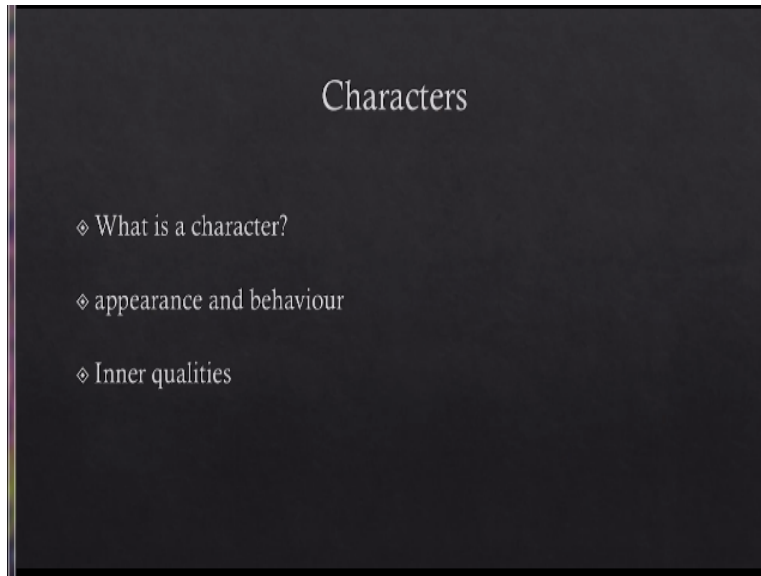
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Now let us take a closer look at the story and we also are going to do an analytic review of it. I am quite interested in the aspect of plotting and I am going to see what exactly derives the plot forward in this story of Khuswant Singh. For me the narrative energy is in the characterisation in the story especially in the character of sir Mohan Lal his character builds a set of anticipations and expectations not only for him.

But also for the readers who kind of look forward to a particular set of events happening in the story but the reverse happens and ultimately there is a sense of tragic comic closer to this ending.

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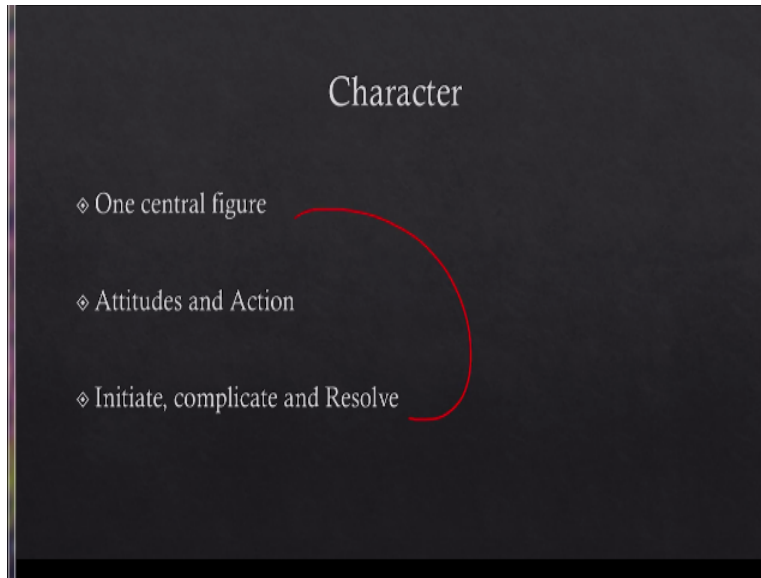
Now say if characterisation is what is that is driving this narrative forward very forcefully and powerfully we need to understand this aspect of structure very very clearly. So, let us ask this very basic question what is a character, a character is someone who has a particular kind of appearance and behaves in a particular manner and that person has a set of enough qualities that basically in brief is what a character is all about.

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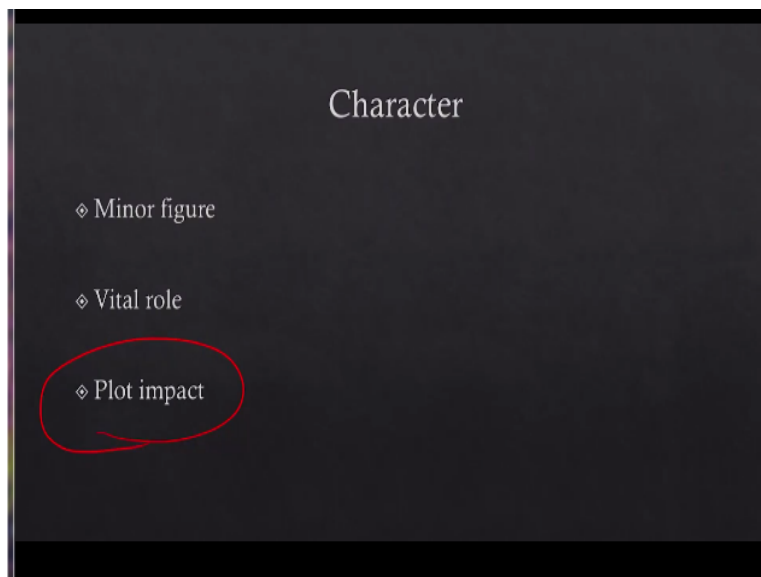
Now to put that in a more organised manner a character has an emotional and intellectual and a moral site to it and let us see what exactly are the emotional intellectual and the moral qualities of sir Mohan Lal.

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Now in a short work of literature usually 1 character is the most prominent on the most dominant and his or her attitudes are what runs the part of what drives the plot. And sometimes the character, the nature of the character his or her motivations, his or her compulsions are what kind of initiates complicate and resolves the plot and this is a very very crucial narrative function that the central figure performs in a work of literature.

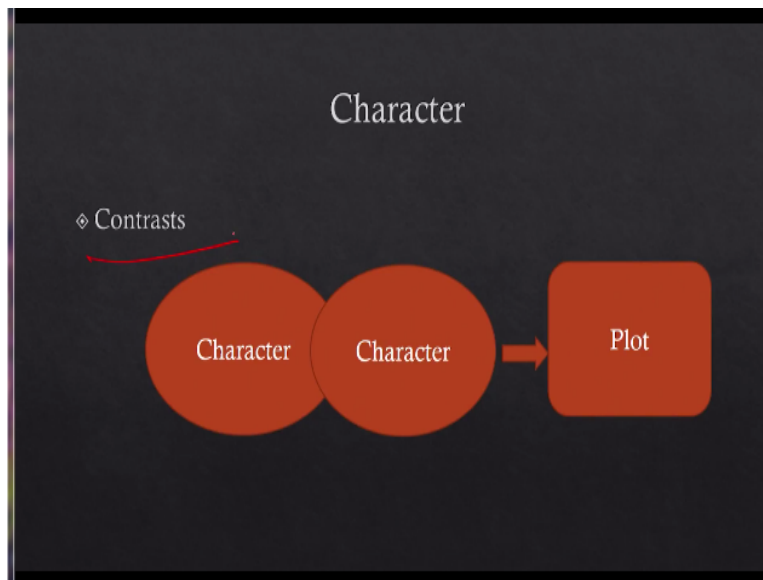
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Now while the central character is the most important figure in a short work or in any work of fiction. There are minor for characters who can complicate or who can help in the resolution of the narrative and we should keep this fact in mind and try and understand what are the motivations of the minor characters and why they behave in the way they do and these minor

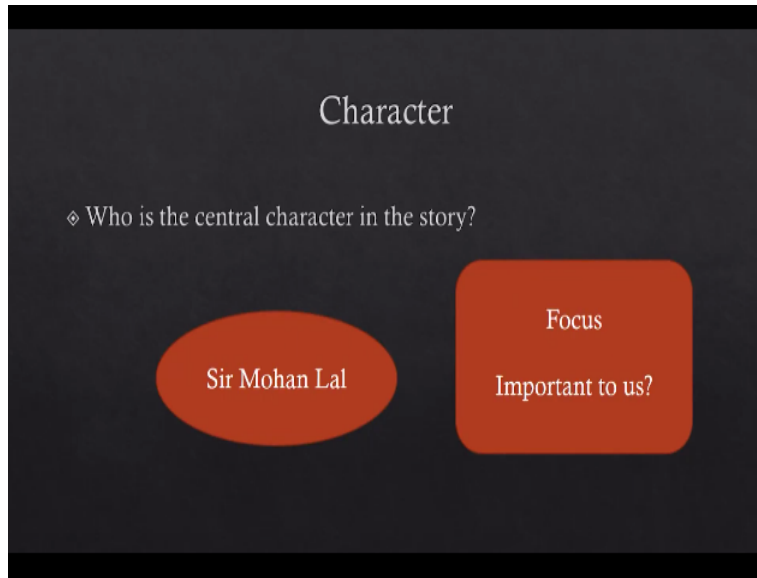
figures can be invested with vital roles in literary works. And as I mention they can have a massive plot impact in the way they intervene in the trajectory of the plot in the narrative of the plot and turn it in a direction that is quite unanticipated and help in it is resolution or in it is closure.

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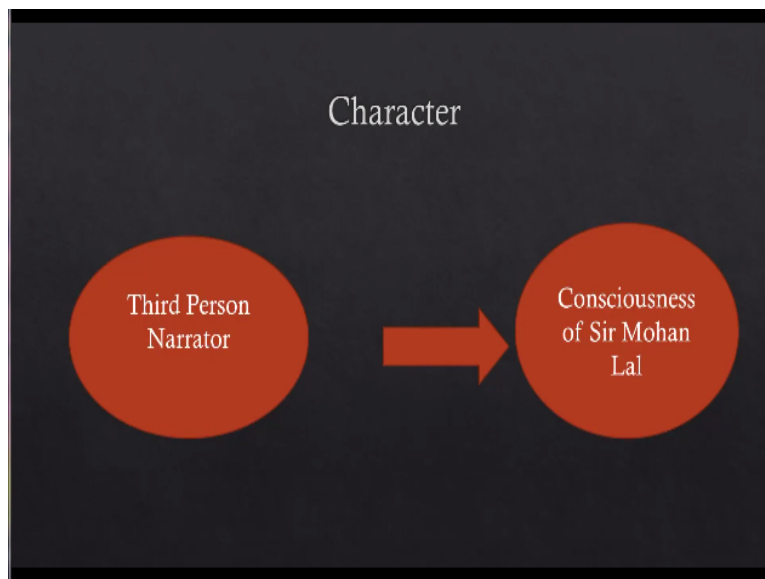
Now if we recall Khuswant singh's theory of a great short story he had once said that a short story is something that you know could be about a character a particular character and that characters relationship with other characters. So, the interaction between 2 different kinds of character could have an impact on the plot, the contrast between the 2 in terms of their attitudes and behaviour could be what is driving the plot forward.

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Let us have quick look at whether that is the case in the case of karma the short story in questions for this week. Now who is the central character in the story it has most obviously sir Mohan Lal what makes us to that particular conclusion we can easily say that the focus of the story is sir Mohan Lal and is he important to us yes he is important to us because we get a window into his thought process and how do we get that.

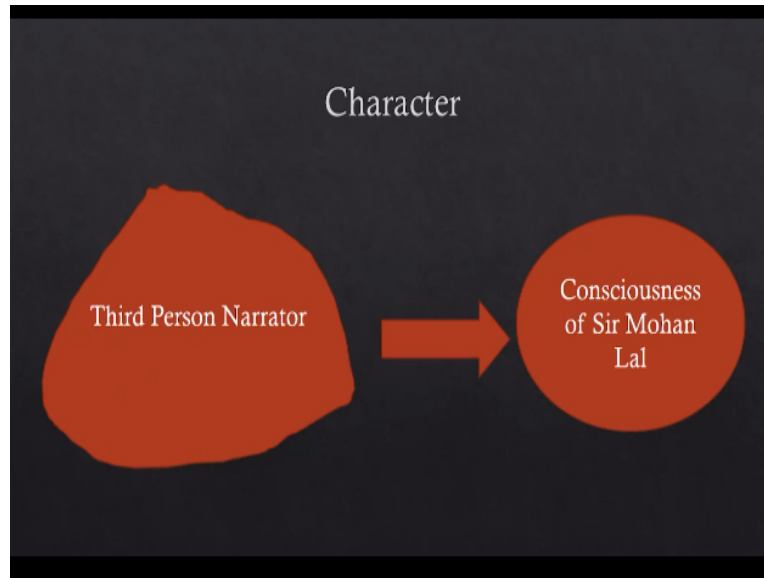
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We get that through the narrative of the third person narrator who is most interested in sir Mohan Lal and as I said we get a picture of the consciousness we get to enter the consciousness. We get to see the consciousness of sir Mohan Lal in this particular story unlike the other characters we get descriptions of Lachmi, we get descriptions of the servants, the barrier who sir Mohan Lal.

But we do not get a detailed narrative about the consciousness on the motivations of the other characters just as we get with sir Mohan Lal.

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The slide is titled "Character" at the top center. Below the title is a question in blue text: "♦ What is the external appearance of the main character?". Below the question is a quote in white text: "‘You are a bit of all right, old chap’ it said. ‘Distinguished, efficient— even handsome. That neatly-trimmed moustache—the suit from Saville Row with carnation in the buttonhole—the aroma of eau de Cologne, talcum powder and scented soap all about you!’". A red circle highlights the word "it" in the quote, and a red line underlines "Saville Row".

Now what is the external appearance of the main character this is an important question, a question that we usually began with in terms of the analysis of a particular character. So, let us begin with the external appearance and then we can see what are the thematic connections between the external appearance and the interior psyche of this character because these 2 usually have some connections.

Now this except from the story tells us some important information as to the physical appearance of sir Mohan Lal is a very interesting name by the way because the word sir tells us that he has been united for his services to the British government. So, he has been accorded the highest honour one of the highest honours in the British governments.

So, that is why the reputation of the word sir is very very interesting because that authority is constantly reinforced the authority that he has gain from the British government is reinforced when that word sir Mohan is repeated in the narrative. So, how does he look like, so this except helps us that you are a bit of alright old chap it said, distinguished, efficient and efficient even handsome.

That neatly trimmed Moustache the suit from Savile row with carnation in the buttonhole, the aroma of eau de cologne, talcum powder scented soap all about you. So, who is this it that is the first question that you might want ask if you have interpret this story but if you have read the story you would know that it is the mirror in the waiting room of the first class compartment.

And this mirror sir Mohan Lal imagines to be talking to him, so the mirror says that the mirror is broken by the way and sir Mohan Lal thinks that the broken mirror the crack mirror is somehow representative or symbolic of the nature of the country itself, how fractured and broken it is. So, the mirror when he the mirror responds to sir Mohan Lal's speech about the condition of you know the mirror.

And by extension the country itself and the mirror says you are a bit of okay old chap you are distinguished you know you got a lot of distinctions you are efficient very efficient and even handsome almost you even good looking that neatly trimmed Moustache and the suit from Savile row from a street in Mayfair London and which is known for making suits to order and the carnation the buttonhole everything you know even the scented fragrances about his figure and body.

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Sir Mohan Lal

- ◇ Gentleman
- ◇ English gentleman
- ◇ “a street in Mayfair, central London. Known principally for its traditional bespoke tailoring for men”

Saville Row

All these tell us something very interesting about this particular character sir Mohan Lal, what is that? That is that he is a gentleman that he is you know a gentleman in the British sense that is he is an English gentleman and as I said Saville row is very important because this tells us that sir Mohan Lal has risen in society to such an extent that he is he has the access to Saville row in Mayfair in London where he bought these suits.

And this particular regions Saville row is known principally for it is traditional you know authentic and conventional suits won by British gentleman.

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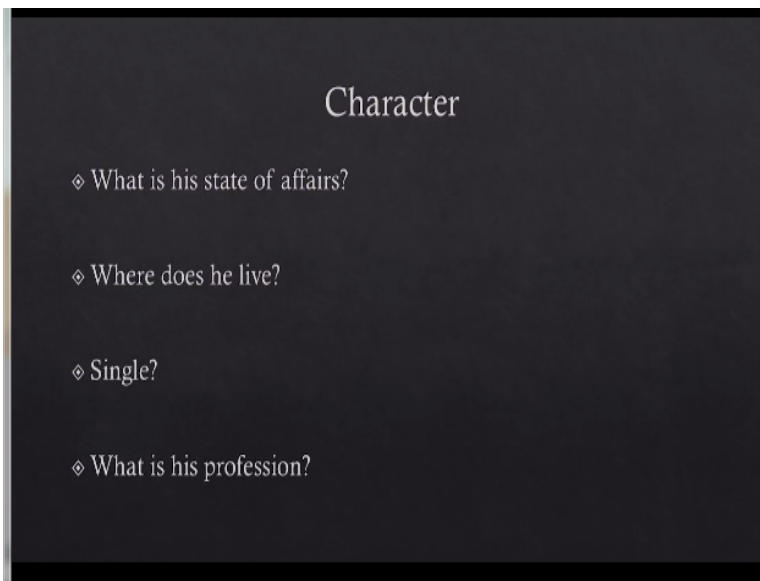
Sir Mohal Lal

Well-groomed
Trimmed Moustache
Aroma of powder, lotion
and scented soap



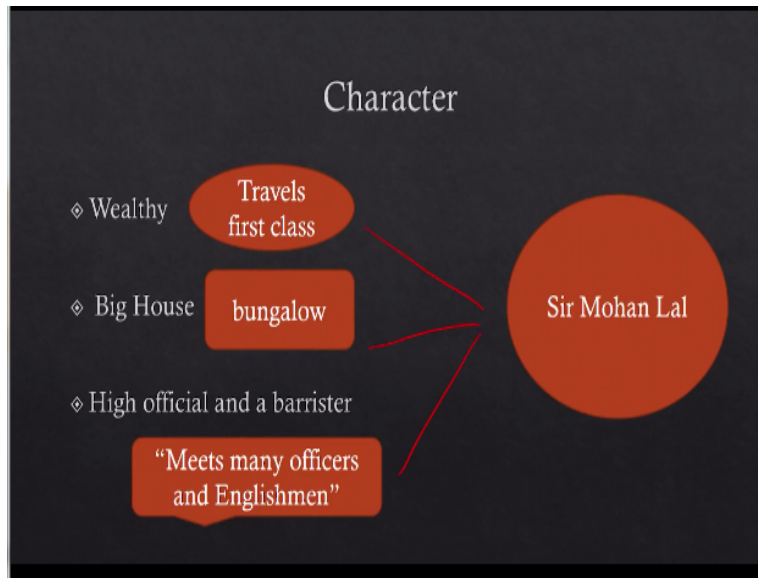
Now I have a picture here of some gentleman and that picture can give you sense of the kind of clothing that sir Mohan Lal might be sporting in this story karma. So, he is very well groomed the central character is very well dressed and his moustache suggest that he is very very tidy person and again the aroma of powder, lotion, after shaving lotion and scented soap tells us he takes good care office appearance and he is very very particular about the way. He appears to the society, he wants to make a particular impression a specific impression on those around him.

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So, we have ask this important question of what is he look like, so we know he looks like a British English gentleman. Now the other set of questions that are crucial to understanding further about his quality of life are these what is his state of affairs whereas he live is he single what is his profession? So, these are some of the question that need a=to be ask to get a really good close understanding of his place in society.

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So, obviously he is wealthy, he must be doing well because he travels first class and he is also using the first class waiting room because that ticket gives him that privilege. And the story also tells us that he has the big house there is a very direct reference to the bungalow that he has and it is a big bungalow with you know probably several stories.

And at one point in this story we get to know through his wife that he is a high official, she calls him the Vizier . And the Vizier could mean high official in a in the colloquial friends and he is also a barrister he has studied for law. He has been called to the bar and he has studied at the in his temple. And the wife also makes it a point to mention that to the coolie that her husband with meet many officers.

And English gentleman in the first class compartment which is why she wants to avoid that space and these are some of the information that tells you that kind of flushes out the physical and the social status of sir Mohan Lal.

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Character

- ◊ What are his significant characteristics?
- ◊ How are they manifested?
- ◊ How does he interact with others?

Now what are so we have asked him you know we have asked this question what is his appearance like you know how wealthy he is and now we come to his significant characteristics and how are they manifested. So, what are his chief you know characteristics and how are they revealed in the story through what sort of action do we get to know his interior workings.

And the other question to ask and observe is how does he interact with others, this is very very important because sometimes only through interactions the real character surfaces. So, you know when a person is on his own on her own we do not get to see his or her personality at work unless that personality kind of has a interchange or an exchange with another person.

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Manifestations of Sir Mohan Lal's Character

- ◊ "very well-bred"
- ◊ Dislikes "Excitement, bustle and hurry"
- ◊ "He wanted everything 'tickety-boo'"

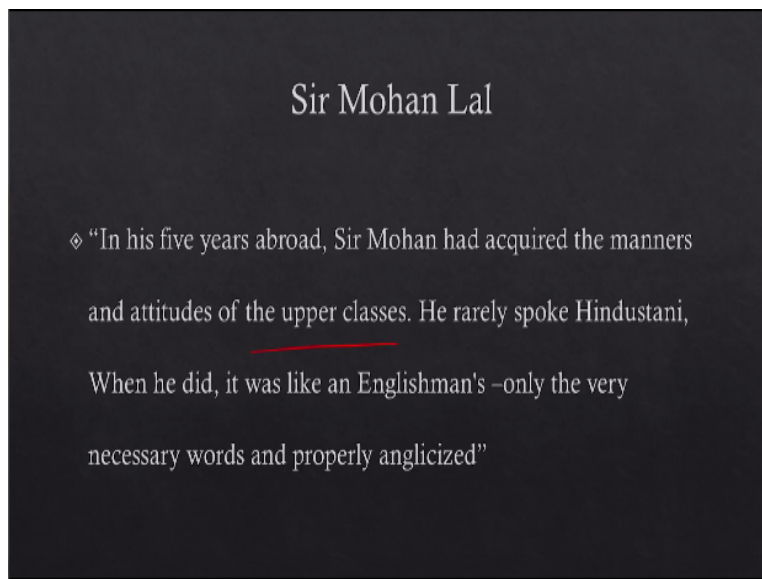
In good order; fine.

Now some manifestations of Sir Mohan Lal's character can be seen through some of these features. We can see that he is very very well bred through the way he has groomed himself that is pretty clear and well established. And the other very interesting thing is that he hates excitement, bustle and hurry. These words are very very interesting because there is a general sense that India is a place of excitement, bustle and hurry.

And these characteristics which are almost sometimes a stereotype of India you know are the things that he does not like very much unlike you know Lachmi who kind of participates in this. He has a very very studied manner of moving about and he also wants everything to be tickety-boo everything to be in good order tickety-boo means in good order or he wants everything to be fine to be perfectly alright.

And tickety-boo is a phrase which is informal and now outdated it is a very English phrase and he uses that actually the third person narrator uses that phrase to kind of give us the sense of the you know words that his central character Mohan Lal would like or uses often.

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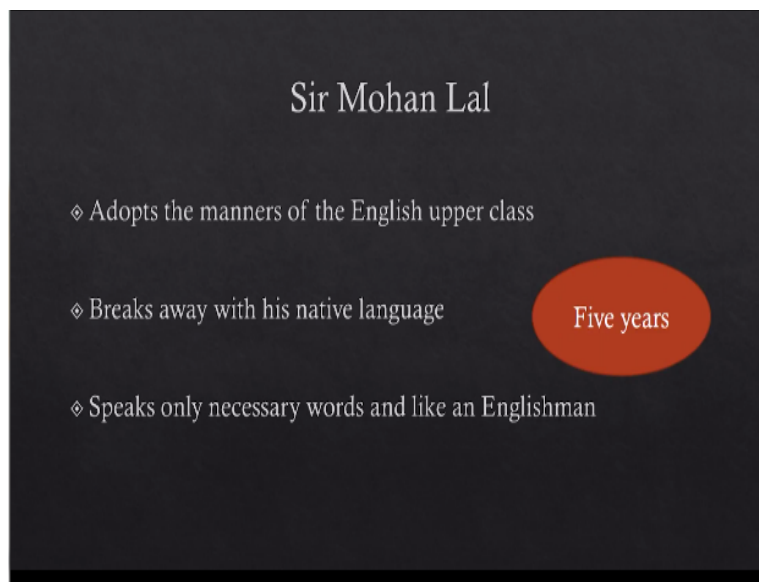


So, the narrator tells us in brief what are his predictions it says the narrator says in his 5 years abroad Sir Mohan Lal had a quite the manners and attitudes of the upper classes. He rarely spoke Hindustani when he did, it was like an Englishman's only the very necessary words and properly

anglicized. So, we get a lot of information from this except that is he spend 5 years abroad only 5 years.

And he while he was there has adopted the manners of the upper classes that is something we need to keep in mind. And when he returns or whenever he gets the chance he speaks Hindustani only when it is absolutely essential and even then he speaks it like an Englishman would speak the language, only the essential content words and pronounced in such a way that they are anglicized.

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So, it is very interesting that he adopts the manners of the upper class it is probably because of his educational context. He went to Oxford, he went to the bar and these are places visited usually by the British higher society. And this window into the educational scenario of the upper classes kind of makes him break away with his native language.

And when he returns he does not connect with the native landscape all about the native culture and that break is signified in the words and phrases that he uses it is very interesting to say to see that he does not use the full sentence instead of he uses only words here and there.

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Sir Mohan Lal

- ◊ Proud of his social background
- ◊ English education at Oxford
- ◊ “anglicized Hindustani”

A diagram consisting of a red oval containing the words "Servants" and "His wife" stacked vertically. Two red lines originate from the text "anglicized Hindustani" in the list above and point towards the oval, indicating that this language is used to address both groups.

Mohan Lal is very very proud of his social background which is chiefly derived through his education at Oxforde and again we need to keep remembering this fact that he uses anglicized Hindustani. Because this is a very vital fact in understanding his psyche and also because he uses anglicized to speak not only to the servants but also to his wife Lachmi and that is a disturbing fact to note and remember.

Now we get another window into how he looks at these 2 nations England and India through this except very important except that I have chosen to read for you here.

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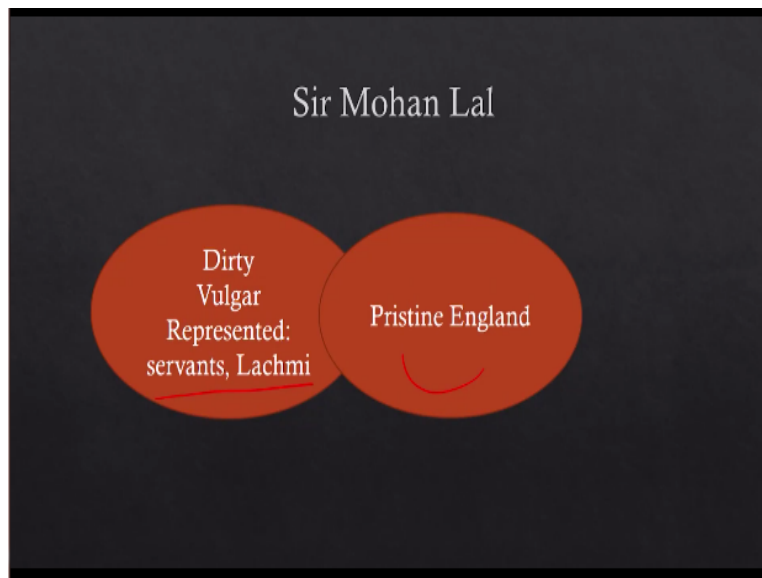
Sir Mohan Lal

- ◊ Five years of a crowded glorious life. Worth far more than the forty-five in India with his dirty, vulgar countrymen, with sordid details of the road to success, of nocturnal visits to the upper storey and all-too-brief sexual acts with obese old Lachmi, smelling of sweat and raw onions.

So, the narrator says 5 years of a crowded glorious life, worth far more than the 45 in India with his dirty, vulgar countrymen, with sordid details of the road to success of nocturnal visits to the upper storey and all too brief sexual acts with obese old Lachmi smelling of sweat and raw onions. So, here we have a comparative evaluation of his life and both these countries. And he says that that there is a disparity in the duration of his life spent in these 2 countries.

But despite the disparity he really appreciates the country where he had spend the least time. So, this gives you again a very very interesting window into sir Mohan Lal's attitude towards his native country and to the foreign country that he had visited

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So, we need to remember one thing that certain groups are clubbed together let us go back to the except dirty, vulgar countrymen and if we look for the dirty, vulgar countrymen in this story we are represented in the servants and in his wife Lachmi. We do not get any other references about the countrymen that he is talking in this story, so these are the representative figures. And then by contrast and by implication there is this understanding that England is pristine , that it is pure, that it is clean, that it is all good and fair.

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Sir Mohan Lal

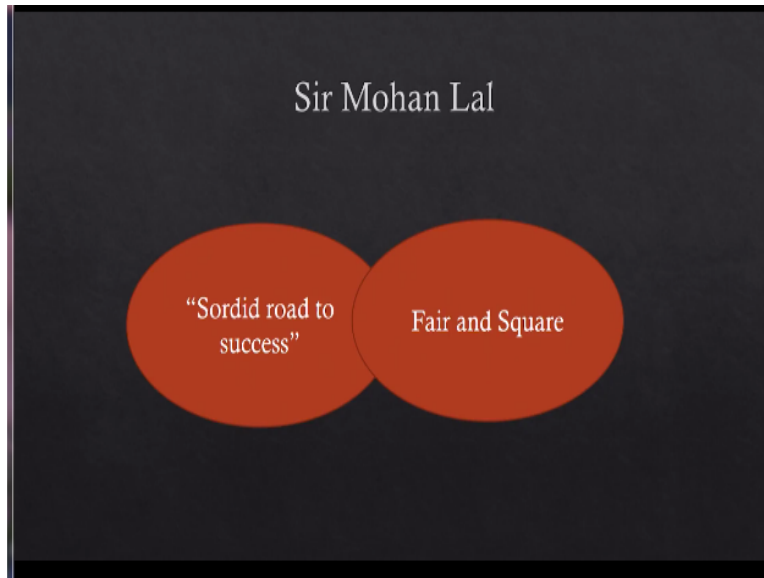
◇ That would open a vista leading to a fairy land of Oxford colleges, masters, dons, tutors, boat-races and rugging matches”

England as a fairy land

And there is also again a very clear cut reference to the positive landscape, the you know the picturesque landscape of England . He says the narrator says that would a vista leading to a fairy land of Oxford colleges, masters, dons, tutors, boat-races and rugging matches . The context for this except is that sir Mohan Lal thinks that if only he could get in Englishman to talk to him through that talk he could get a sense of all these places.

He can visit these places second hand and he can go back to that land the fairy land of Oxford colleges and all these people who and all these things that people that landscape of Oxford. So, England is by extension painted as a fairy land, this is a very interesting and again a very disturbing notion to have about a country that is colonising the nation. And we need to keep this interesting notion of sir Mohan Lal in mind while we are evaluating him.

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So, the other interesting phrase in that except is the sordid road to success if you remember that except that we looked at before that is this one with sordid details of the road to success. So, this phrase tells us that sir Mohan Lal's rise to success on the Indian soil is probably not very respectable in some way or the other. So, sordid means something that is not right something unhealthy mean an underhand about that progress.

And this association of sordid nature to the native land implies that the other country that sir Mohan Lal is obsessing with is somehow in terms of its moral values is fair and coir in its dealing. So, there is a contrast that is being set up shortly by these evaluations of sir Mohan Lal and we get to know this through the narrative view point of the third person narrator.

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Sir Mohan Lal

◇ “Those five years of grey bags and gowns, of sport blazers and mixed doubles, of dinners at the Inns of Court and nights with Piccadilly prostitutes”

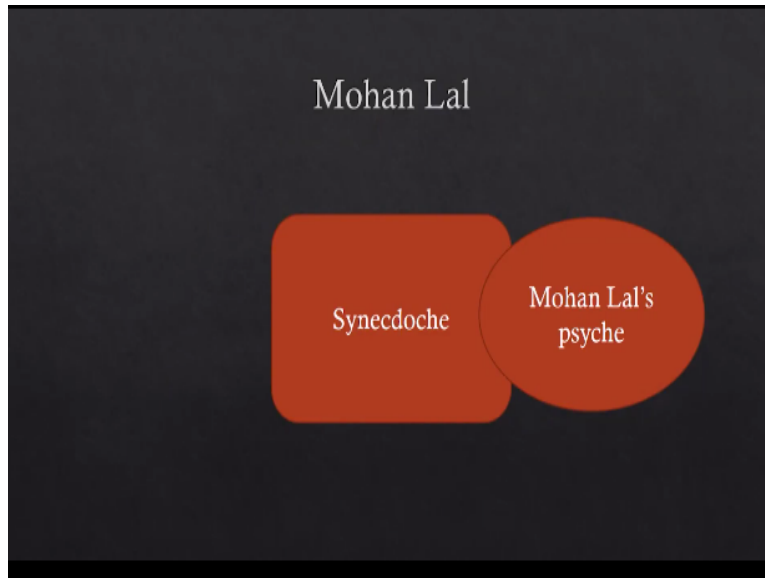
◇ Rhetorical features

Parallelisms

And again those 5 years that sir Mohan Lal has been in England is a kind of a happy place in his mind. One that he keeps revisiting through all these various objects and references to England. And he says that those 5 years of grey bags and gowns of sport blazers and mixed doubles of winners at the ends of court and nights with Piccadilly prostitutes.

So, he fantasies about all these aspects again once he has left the region and is back on Indian soil. And I want to take a good look at the parallelisms that is built that are built in this structural frame work you can see the grey bags and gowns of sport places and mixed doubles of inners and ins in court and nights with the Piccadilly. So, there is a nice balancing act on that is going on in this particular statement and we need to again dwelt deeper into the parallelisms that are referenced here.

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Now again all these things that are pointed out the bags and the gowns and the dinners and the prostitutes. They are elements that are picked out you know disparate elements in some sense they are picked out and they are enjoyed in you know a distinctly, separately out of that cultural context and what is that tell us. So, there is a lot of synecdoche in this narrative and in the psyche of Mohan Lal.

He is enjoying things out of their context he is just taking them out of the wall in some sense and kind of releasing them you know on their own in isolated fashion. So, let us look at the rationale and the consequences of such an enjoyment as well.

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Synecdoche

◆ “a literary device in which a part of something represents the whole, or it may use a whole to represent a part.”

Disparate things

Commodities

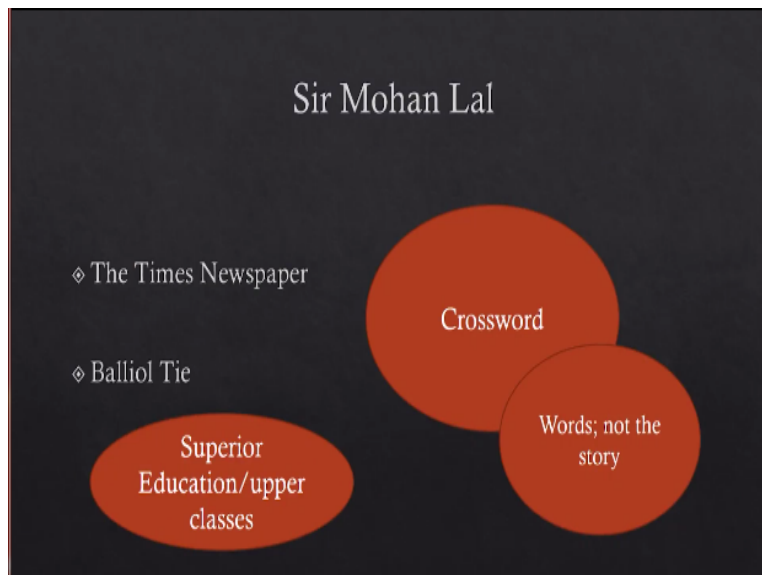
England - odd

The slide has a dark grey background. At the top center, the word 'Synecdoche' is written in a light grey font. Below it is a definition: '◆ “a literary device in which a part of something represents the whole, or it may use a whole to represent a part.”'. At the bottom, there is a red oval containing the words 'Disparate things' and 'Commodities'. To the right of the oval, the word 'England' is written in red cursive, with a red line pointing to the oval and the text '- odd' written below it.

So, what exactly is synecdoche is a literary device in which a part of something represents the whole or the whole maybe use to represent the part . So, either of these things are possible and so all these objects and things that reference there earlier in the extract the mixed doubles, the mixed doubles in tennis games or the Piccadilly prostitutes or the gowns all represents certain elements of English culture.

And again consequently they represent England itself the country itself. So, disparate things and commodities come to stand for England in the mind of sir Mohan Lal and that is very very odd, that is unusual and because that tells you that his psyche is fractured in some sense and fracturing of the psyche could be associated what he is brake from his own nation.

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Okay again let us look at the other materiality that sir Mohan Lal associates with England and that he revisits while he is on Indian soil. So, the times newspaper, the reference to the times concept time and again in the storey and he kind of criticises in this newspaper. He carries it like a beacon so to speak because he thinks that if the Englishman see the newspaper they would kind of flecked to him in some sense metaphorically.

And then from there he could have a conversation or a dialogue with all these English folks. The other element that he fetishists is the Balliol tie the Balliol tie is something that he has received from h Balliol college one of the colleges at Oxford university. So, he wears this distinct object

on his person and hoping that the tie if noticed by a British gentleman would leave to conversations about the country back there.

So, the other details that are interesting in this context is the crossword the crossword on the times newspaper which sir Mohan Lal is very fond of doing and again if we analyse this idea of the crossword it is not an narrative is not a entire narrative an extended narrative but it is a kind of a game with words and you know the conjuring of words.

So, that again the idea of taking words out of a larger linguistic discourse has a symbolic impact on the nature of sir Mohan Lal who also takes out words and objects and people from the cultural context of Britain and he kind of enjoys them in isolation. So, it is a weird interior world of sir Mohan Lal that we have experience so far and one of the reasons for this structure, this internal psychological structure could be due to his superior within quotes education .

That most of the upper classes and British society receives in Britain. So, somehow the implication is that this superior education is wrapping the mind of this native man who has gone there to get higher education. Again the colour context of the grey in this particular except is very interesting because grey has a particular set of resonances in British culture and they are about sophistication they are about superior class.

And they are about being English and even the weather to make a very superficial association here the English weather.

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The English weather is suppose to be of a great tone it is always already cloudy back there in Britain. And this is contrasted this grey of sophistication superiority is contrast with the dirt of the Indian subcontinent thank you for watching, I will catch up with you in the next session.