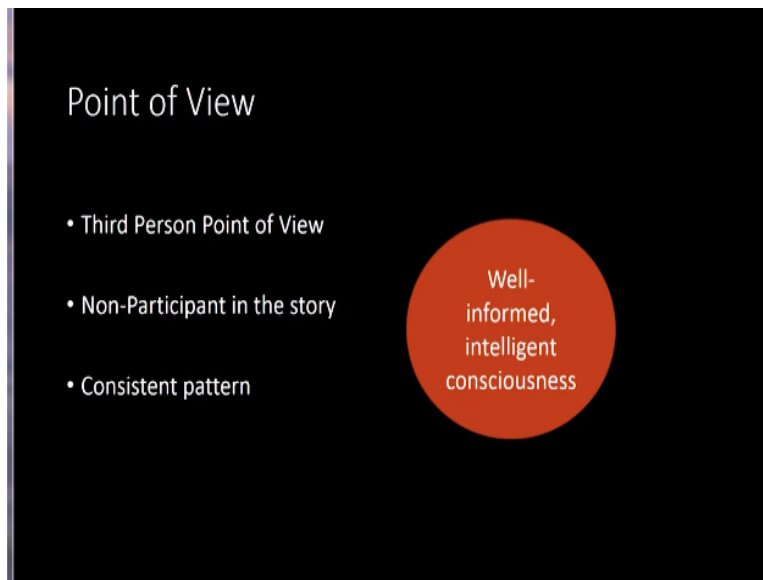


**Short Fiction in Indian Literature**  
**Prof. A. Divya**  
**Department of Humanities & Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology-Madras**

**Lecture-17**  
**Narrative aspects in Khuswant Singh's Karma**

Hello and welcome to this last part of my lecture series on Khuswant Singh's Karma, I have titled this lecture narrative aspects in the story. So, we will pick up on some of the narrative and structural issues which have not been considered in the previous sessions and we will take a good look at them today.

**(Refer Slide Time: 00:39)**



Now I want to begin by focusing on the point of view, so what exactly is the point of view or the perspective in this story, how is it told? Who is it told by. So, we have the third person point of view in the story this is narrated by third person narrator who does not participate in this story. So, we have a non-participating narrator who tells us the story and this point of view that is the third person point of view is pretty consistent in the story.

There is not any grade narrative shifts in point of view okay, so what sort of narrator is this person, this narrator is very well in form this narrator is highly intelligent and he has a very good understanding of the consciousness of the central character and some of the minor characters in

the story as well. So, we have a solid narrator who is omniscient in some sense because this narrator is well aware of the events that are happening in this particular story vault.

**(Refer Slide Time: 02:03)**

## Free Indirect Discourse

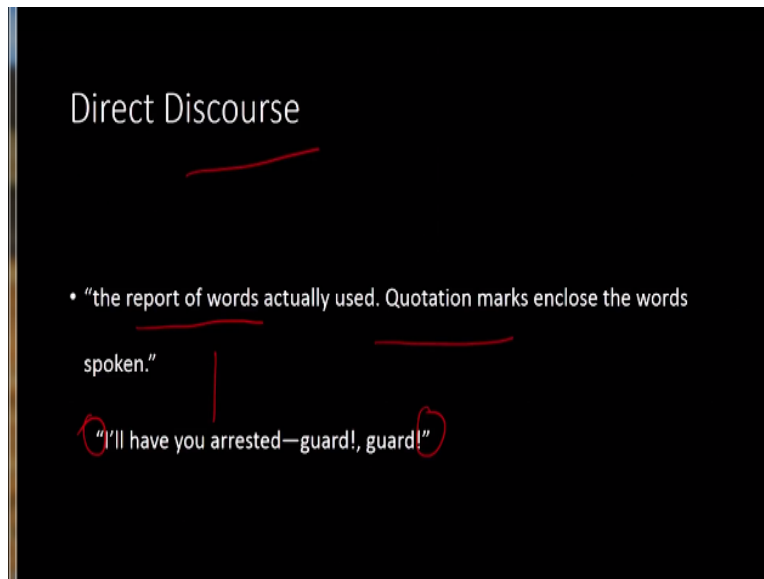
- “a style of third-person narration that easily slips into reporting the actual point of view, speech, thought, or feelings of characters but without quotation marks. At times, it’s difficult to separate the narrator’s “voice” from the “voice” of the character.”

Now I want to talk a little bit about free indirect discourse because this free indirect discourse type of narration is evident in Khuswant singh’s. So, let us see first what exactly this type of discourse is, it is a style of third person narration that easily slips into reporting the actual point of view, speech, thought of feelings of characters. But without quotation marks, a times it is difficult to separate the narrator’s voice from the voice of the character.

So, we have the point of view about a set of characters that are reported in the text without the quotation marks and this is the first thing to notice about free indirect this cost. And the second thing which I think is very very significant is that it is difficult to separate or distinguish between the narrator's voice and the voice of the character it seems that there is a blend between and these 2 types of narrative discourse.

So, we do not know who exactly is commenting or who exactly is thinking these thoughts. So, it becomes difficult to separate the narrator's voice or commentary from the voice of the character. Now just to be absolutely sure what is the difference between direct discourse and indirect discourse and free indirect discourse, I will briefly give you the definition for each of these categorise, so what exactly is direct discourse.

**(Refer Slide Time: 04:00)**



Direct discourse is the report of words actually used, so we have quotation marks which enclose the words spoken and giving you the example from this story in question for this week which is Karma and I will have you arrested guard, guard are the words spoken by sir Mohan Lal. So, we have the report of words here and we have quotation marks that enclose or contain these words spoken by the character in question here.

So, this is direct discourse, before I move onto what exactly is indirect discourse , I hope you know what is the meaning of discourse do check it up discourse is about discourse means simply speech it could be spoken words or it could be words that are written down, so it is not a terribly difficult concept to understand.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:02)**

## Indirect Discourse

- “the indirect report of words or thoughts -- without quotation marks.”
- “Sir Mohan wondered if he would travelling alone”

Now what exactly is indirect discourse, indirect discourse means the indirect report of words not the direct but the indirect report of words or thoughts without quotation marks. So, again I am giving you an example from our text karma this is a statement taken from the story, sir Mohan wondered if he would be travelling alone and this is a thought by the character when he is going to board the train.

And he wonders if he is going to be travelling alone without any companions in the first class compartment. So, this is an indirect reporting of thoughts that the central character has.

**(Refer Slide Time: 05:55)**

## Narrative Point of view

- “Then followed Sir Mohan’s handsome gold cigarette case filled with English cigarettes. English cigarettes in India? How on earth did he get them? Sure he didn’t mind? And Sir Mohan’s understanding smile—of course he didn’t mind. But could he use the Englishman as a medium to commune with his dear old England?”

Now I want to look at a particular extract from the story in the context of free indirect discourse and this is a perfect passage to do such a reading and I have taken this except from the story karma. Then followed sir Mohan's handsome gold cigarette case filled with English cigarettes, English cigarettes in India how on earth did he get them? Sure he did not mind and sir Mohan's understanding smile.

Of course he did not mind but could he use the English man as a medium to commune with this dear old England. So, to give a little bit of context for this passage this is a part of the set of inventory that sir Mohan has to attract the attention of the English gentleman who would be travelling with him. So, he has the whisky and he has the cigarettes as well in order to attract the English passengers.

So, this gold cigarette case is pretty attractive and it is filled with English cigarettes and the following set of questions are very very interesting in terms of the narration. So, English cigarettes in India how on earth did he get them, sure he did not mind, so these questions are some of the questions that are typically asked by his audience who would the English gentleman travelling with him.

**(Refer Slide Time: 07:42)**

Point of view

- English cigarettes in India? How on earth did he get them? Sure he didn't mind?
- Questions of Sir Mohan's audience.
- Surprise and admiration
- Etiquette

Woven into the discourse  
Without quotation marks

The slide features a black background with white text. A red circle is positioned on the right side, containing the text 'Woven into the discourse' and 'Without quotation marks'. Red lines connect the first three bullet points to the circle, and a larger red line connects the entire list to the circle.

So, these questions are woven into the discourse, oven into the narrative point of view by the author and we do not have quotation marks here as well something that we need to keep in mind.

So, these questions are so typical that the narrator kind of you know compiles them into that narrator without having a particular gentleman or gentleman's speak these questions or utter these questions.

So, these are from the typical audience of sir Mohan who are impressed and surprised and they admire the fact that he has English cigarettes on Indian soil. And something else that we need to note is that he has the narrator has made sure that he also included the etiquette of the gentleman who ask these questions in a particular manner. So, this is a very very interesting except 2 analyse in terms of the narrative point of view.

**(Refer Slide Time: 08:51)**

Point of view

- smile—of course he didn't mind
- Indirect discourse
- Sir Mohan Lal's thought?
- The narrator's interpretation

Smile and the words that he didn't mind?  
Or is the smile the interpretation that he didn't mind?

And again this phrase Mohan's understanding smile of course he is did not mind he is very interesting because we do not know whether he smiles and then says of course he did not mind or the narrator is interpreting that smile as of course he did not mind. So, there are 2 things happening there the smile and the question and the statement of course he did not mind and the smile as an interpretation of course he did not mind.

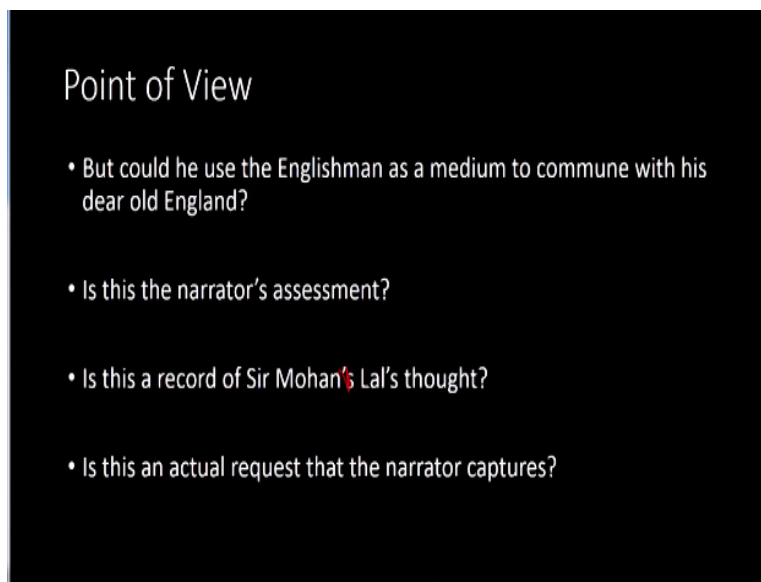
So, we have a example indirect discourse here too and a very very shuttle interpretation happening there too. So, there is a slight ambiguity as to whether it is the part of sir Mohan Lal or whether it is the narrator's interpretation or whether it is sir Mohanlal's question there

mentioned by the narrator. So, it is a very ambiguous set of ideas and notions that are there in the extract.

Now the last statement that I have included in that except is this one but could he use the English man as a medium to commune with this dear all England again this question has a slight ambiguity which is this the narrator's assessment, the narrator's commentary, the narrator's judgement of sir Mohan Lal or is this a record of sir Mohanlal's thought process, communicated to us by the narrator.

Or is this an actual request of sir Mohan Lal that the narrator captures in writing for us again there is a complex ambiguity here in this statement from this particular extract.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:05)**

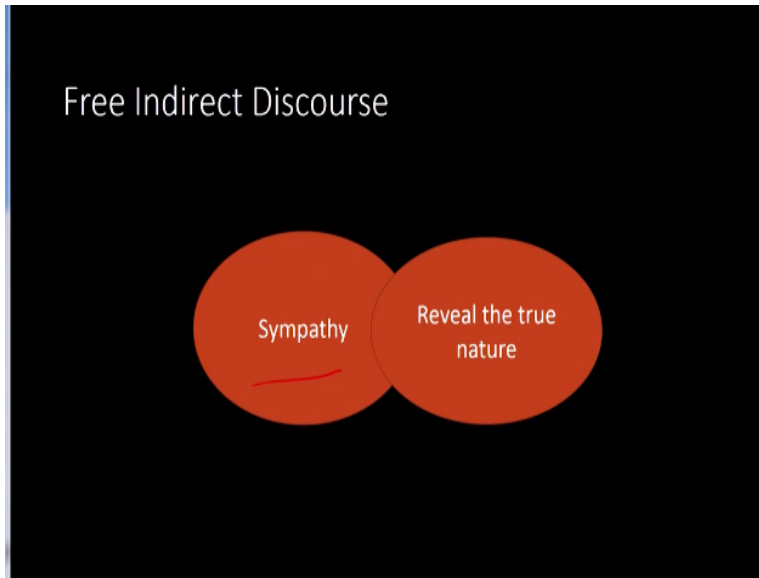


Point of View

- But could he use the Englishman as a medium to commune with his dear old England?
- Is this the narrator's assessment?
- Is this a record of Sir Mohan Lal's thought?
- Is this an actual request that the narrator captures?

And it just tells us how rich and the passage becomes the thought processes of the character and the narrator becomes when we kind of study the passage from the point of view analysis. So, there is complexity, there is a lot of layers that needs to be unraveled to get at the meaning that the author of the story wants to convey in this particular short story.

**(Refer Slide Time: 11:37)**



Now what are all the possible benefits that can a crew to the author to employ when he or she is employing free indirect discourse the very first thing would be to get the sympathy of the reader. So, when the reader is given a really good understanding and a close understanding of on the various thought processes and ideas and feelings and intuitions of the central characters.

Of course such narration would evoke the sympathy of the reader that is 1 thing. The other thing is that such free indirect discourse will unravel or revealed the real or the true identity of the character whose thoughts and whose ideas are being narrated in such a fashion. So, the real identity the psychological makeup of the central character would be manifested for the benefit of the reader.

**(Refer Slide Time: 12:50)**



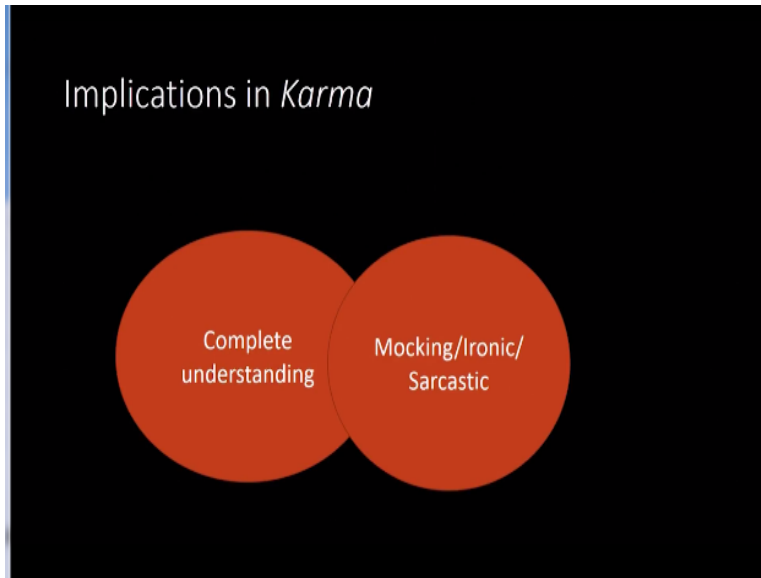
## Free indirect discourse

- “a writer both to maintain the “public,” “objective” stance of the 3rd-  
person narrator
- to create a sense of the interior life of characters.”

Now the other benefits or the positive impulses that are available in the employment of free indirect discourse are these. A writer can both maintain the public or the objective stands of the third person who writes that is one thing and the author can also create a sense of the interior life of the characters. So, 2 possibilities are available to the writer who employs free indirect discourse there is this objective side to the narration.

The very very fair direct style of narration whether is a lot of objectivity as well as there is the possibility to be allowed to use the subjective side to characters in that their interior life will be discussed in detail when the free indirect discourse captures the thought process and the motions in the feelings of the central character.

**(Refer Slide Time: 14:03)**



Now how do we understand the free indirect discourse in the context of Khuswant singh's karma what are the implications what are the messages, what are the significances of such a narrative view point in this particular story. So, when we get good idea of the thinking of the central character we do get a good understanding, a complete understanding of the psyche or the psychological processes of central characters of Mohan Lal.

That is one thing the other thing is that we understand or we get a sense we get a clue as to the possibility of the narrator of the this story we kind of get a sense that he or she is mocking a times the central characters of Mohan Lal there is irony in some of the words employed by the narrator and there is also greater sarcasm in the words or the commentary of the narrator. So, we get a lot of perspectives we get an understanding from several different angles of the central character and we also get the interpretation the slant of the narrating psyche too.

**(Refer Slide Time: 15:31)**

## Point of View

- “The soldiers paused. It almost sounded like English, but they knew better than to trust their inebriated ears.”

Internal  
consciousness

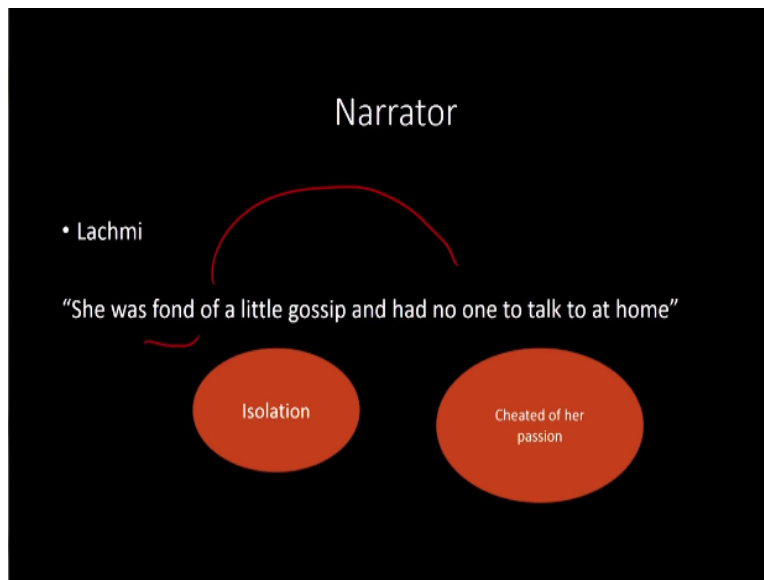
Disbelief at a  
native's fluent  
English

Now I want to give another example in this context and this is from the latest stages of the story when 2 soldiers both the train and there is a confrontation between the soldiers and sir Mohan Lal when the soldiers ask him to leave the compartment and sir Mohan Lal is scandalised he talks to him to talks to the 2 soldiers and his oxford accent and the soldiers past, it almost sounded like English but they knew better than to trust their inebriated ears.

So, here the fact they knew better than to trust their to drunken ears, drunken listening skills tells us that the narrator is aware of the thought process of the soldiers too, he has entered their consciousness and he gives us what they think he tells the readers what these drunken soldiers think on hearing the on hearing the good English on the oxford English of sir Mohan Lal.

So, this narrator is able to enter the internal consciousness of these minor characters too and he tells us, he tells the readers that there is disbelieve on the part of the 2 soldiers who cannot trust who do not trust their ears when they hear native fluent English and that is a very very interesting viewpoint. But the point I am trying to make here is that this narrator is omniscient in the sense that he is able to enter the minds and thought process of the minor characters too, if he wants too.

**(Refer Slide Time: 17:21)**



Now let me also briefly pick up on the narrator in terms of the narration that is accorded to her personality. So, Lachmi the wife of sir Mohan Lal do not get a lot of narrative space in this story. But whatever lines she get a very very important and this narrator does not enter too much into her thought process perhaps because the narrator wants to keep the unity of effect in this story.

And if he deals too much into the thought process of Lachmi then maybe that unity that coherence to the story might be lost. So, he spends very little narrative energy on Lachmi but on the 1 or 2 ideas that are thrown about her a very influential and interesting and significant. So, here we have a line from the narrator about what her likes and dislikes her predilections are. And the narrator says she was fond of little gossip they were fond is very very interesting she like love to gossip a little and had no one to talk to at home.

So, that contrast here between her fondness and her disappointment in that she does not realise her pleasures in life gives a bit of appointment she about her state of affairs. So, we are brought we are kind of told about her isolation and how she is treated of her passion in her married state. So, (()) (19:10) of narrative viewpoints are very interesting in the sense that they give her a wholesome or a holistic perspective of what life was like in the story wealth of karma.

**(Refer Slide Time: 19:27)**

## Significance of the title--Karma

- Karma
- "(in Hinduism and Buddhism) the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences."
- informal Good or bad luck, viewed as resulting from one's actions.

Now I want to talk a little bit about this structural aspect of the title and its significance, so what exactly is karma how do we understand the term karma. Here I have a definition in this is what the definition says in Hinduism and Buddhism the sum of a person's actions in this and previous states of existence, viewed as deciding their fate in future existences.

So, whatever you are actions have been in your previous and your present state your present life will decide the fate of your future lives. So, if you do good in your past and your present your future life will be good too if you do the reverse, if you do bad things in the previous life and this life then your future life will also be evil for you will be difficult for you.

So, informally the word means good or bad luck viewed as resulting from one action which as I said if you do good things, good things will happen to you. If you do bad things, bad things will happen to you. So, what is the karma of sir Mohan Lal that would be the logical question to ask.

**(Refer Slide Time: 20:48)**



So, let us look at his punishments he is come upon his rewards in this story, his getting thrown out of the train is one of the major punishments that he receives at the end of this story, it is a physical assault it is a physical injury and it is a really brutal both she has physic and to his circum and to this psyche. And the second punishment that he receives is that his wife spits out of the train just after he has fall in of it and that is a very very interesting gesture.

So, being spat at from the train not deliberately not purposefully but 2 things happen 1 after the other. The husband falls out of the train and the wife's spits at out of the window of the train as the train is departing. So, sir Mohan Lal is left behind you know injured and insulted, so these of the 2 punishments the karma that he receives at the end of the story.

**(Refer Slide Time: 21:53)**

## Title

- What is the importance of the title?
- Befitting title
- "What you sow, you will reap"

Insulted and Isolated

Now so the title in such a set of circumstances is very very befitting, it is an appropriate title in the Indian context. And what exactly is the importance of the title it justifies this belief that what you sow, you will reap. So, he insulted in isolated certain set of people and he gets his components for that.

**(Refer Slide Time: 22:21)**

## Irony

"the unexpected difference or lack of agreement"

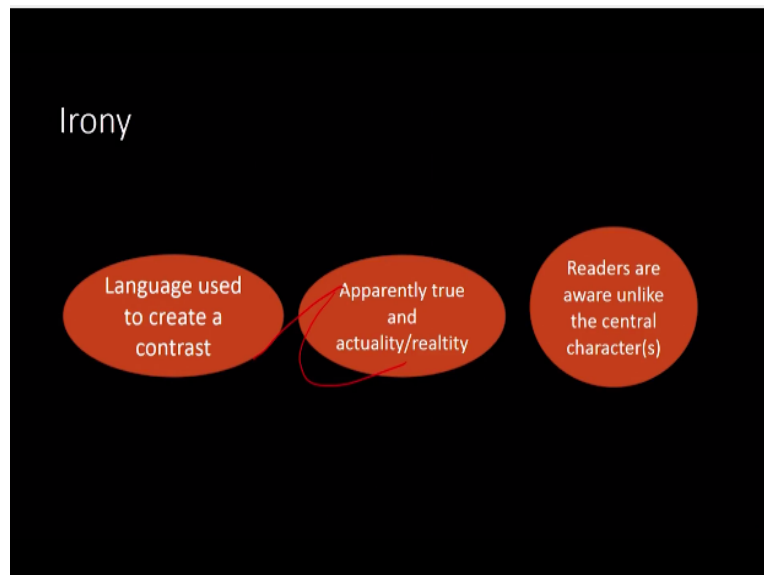
Appearance Truth  
Expectation Reality

So, I want to talk a little bit about this idea of insult and isolation. So, he insulted both his countryman and his family and his wife especially he also isolated them treated them a second class citizens as servants, as slaves. And therefore he gets a same kind of treatment from the English people whom he kind of trusted and admired and looked up to, so that is the biggest karma that he gets at the finale of the story.

Now irony I want to talk about irony as well because this quite a lot of this aspect of narration in this particular story. So, what is irony how do you define irony occurs or happens when there is an unexpected difference or lack of agreement between appearance and reality. So, you expect 1 thing that you get in other thing you consider a situation to be a particular thing but in reality it happens to be something else.

So, there is a mismatch between appearance and truth there is a mismatch between expectations and reality what actually happens. So, there are quite a number of instances of irony in this story.

**(Refer Slide Time: 23:55)**



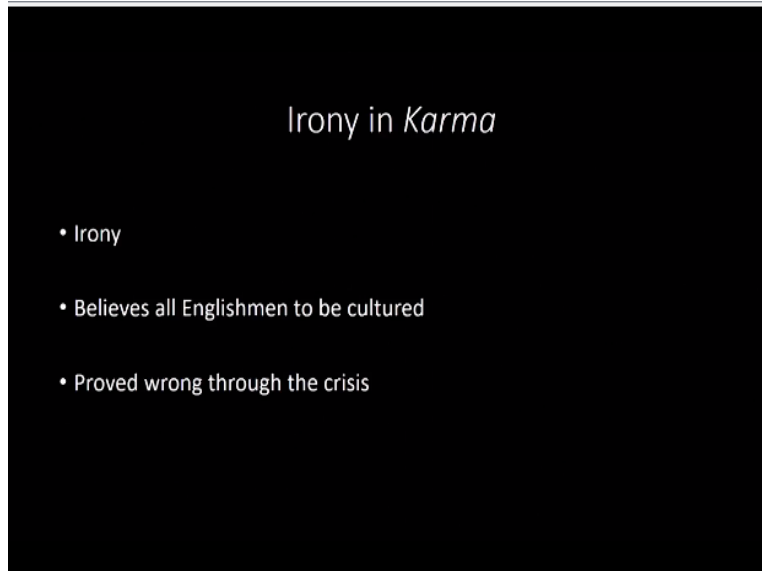
And irony can be used with the help of language used with the help of language in the sense that language kind of bills this contrast. In this contrast of the difference legislation between what is apparently to and what is the actuality or the reality in life. And sometimes the readers are aware of what is going to happen while characters themselves are unaware of the reality of things to come.

So, in the case of karma when we see these 2 drunken soldiers work in and talk roughly and roughly to sir Mohan Lal we do get a sense that things are not going to go well for sir Mohan Lal and he might be possibly be assaulted. But sir Mohan Lal is unaware of such a state of things that might happen to him. So, the irony on the whole is in the fact that sir Mohan Lal believes all



Englishmen to be culture that is his biggest flaw for him all Englishmen are part of this upper class society.

**(Refer Slide Time: 25:13)**

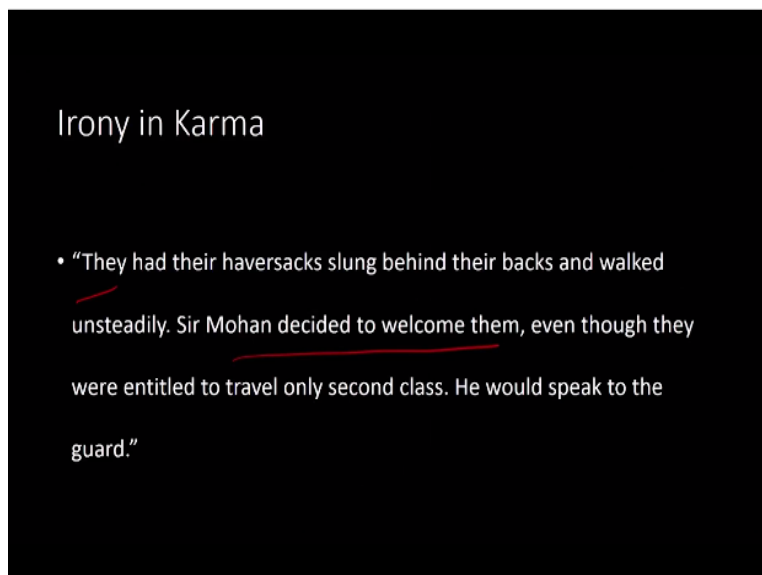


Irony in *Karma*

- Irony
- Believes all Englishmen to be cultured
- Proved wrong through the crisis

And they all behave and superior ways and that is not the reality, that is just a first shot but sir Mohan Lal understands that is the Gospel's true. So, that and that impression of sir Mohan Lal is deconstructed is destroyed when he is proved wrong in that crisis at the end of the story when he is attacked by these 2 English soldiers. So, his fake in the superior nature of English man and English society is destroyed at the end of the story.

**(Refer Slide Time: 25:58)**

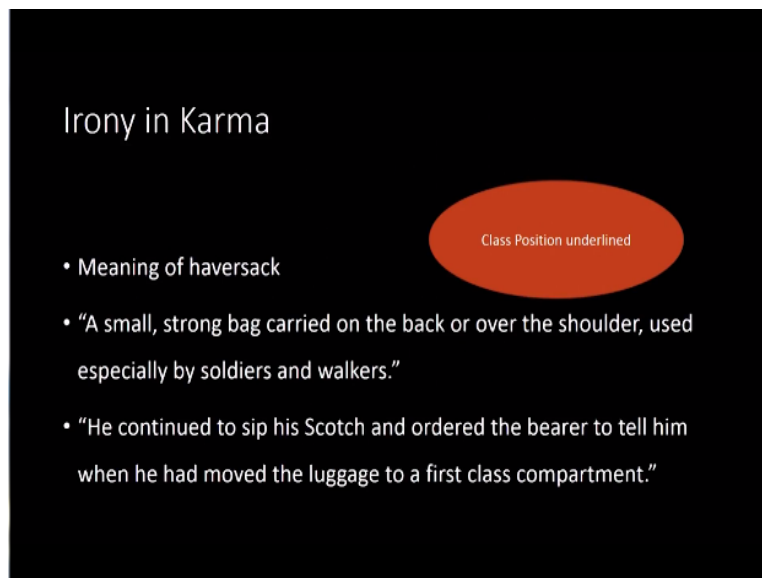


Irony in *Karma*

- "They had their haversacks slung behind their backs and walked unsteadily. Sir Mohan decided to welcome them, even though they were entitled to travel only second class. He would speak to the guard."

I also want to quickly look at the particular passage when he first sees these 2 soldiers walk along the platform and I want to read the irony that is coded in that description. They had their haversacks that is the 2 soldiers they had their haversacks slung behind their backs and walked unsteadily. Sir Mohan decided to welcome them, even though they were entitled to travel only second class. He would speak to the guard.

**(Refer Slide Time: 26:35)**



Irony in Karma

- Meaning of haversack
- “A small, strong bag carried on the back or over the shoulder, used especially by soldiers and walkers.”
- “He continued to sip his Scotch and ordered the bearer to tell him when he had moved the luggage to a first class compartment.”

Class Position underlined

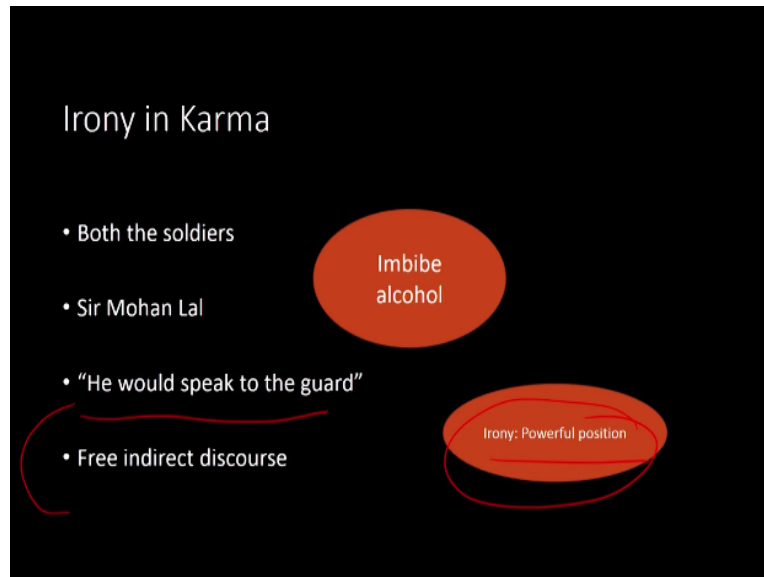
So, let us first look at what is the meaning of the word haversack, it means a big bag small strong bag carried on the bag or over the shoulder used especially by soldiers and walkers. And this idea of the 2 soldiers carrying their big bags on their shoulders is very interesting because it also evokes another scene when sir Mohan Lal is enjoying his frank and he asks his bearer to carry the bags onto the compartment.

So, this is the extract in which that reference is, he continue to set his scotch and order the bearer to tell him when he had move the luggage to a first class compartment. So, he has a bearer his servant to carry the bags to the compartment and it is very interesting that these people who are made to carry things for other people it is it is a nice parallel that we have here between the servant class that sir Mohan Lal uses.

And the second class English soldiers who carry the bags on their backs and it is there who kind of hit back at him, they kind of put him in his place. This seems to be something interesting

going on in that class structure and it is implications and it is connections to sir Mohan Lal which would be interesting to work it out. Now it also very important to notice the parallel between the soldiers and sir Mohan Lal in that both of them in by alcohol.

**(Refer Slide Time: 28:31)**



Both the soldiers and sir Mohan Lal participate in this consumption of alcohol and that parallel between the 2 is very interesting. And he says he would speak to the guard look at the condescension that he has in the fact that he would intercede on the behalf of the soldiers and get the guards permission to let them stay on the first class compartment.

So, both the soldiers and sir Mohan Lal drink alcohol before they go the train, the only difference is that they take their drink to a greater extent where sir Mohan Lal just takes a little bit of it and then there is an example of free indirect discourse and the statement he would speak to the guard. And the other important thing to notice there is this aspect of condescension that is employed by sir Mohan Lal.

There is arrogance there, there is consciousness of power there and he thinks that he is in a powerful position to intercede on their behalf when the opposite is true as the unfolding set of circumstances will tell us.

**(Refer Slide Time: 30:00)**

## Irony in Karma

- The guards do not come to the rescue
- The guard's coach is at the far end
- Failure to be protected is Symbolic

Next to the Zenana  
inter-class coach

So, there is irony in the fact that the guards do not come to the rescue in fact the guards coach is at the far end of the train, in fact next to the Zenana. So, they are too far away to come to his rescue when he calls for them and the fact that he is not protected when he wants protection is also very symbolic and significant and that underlines the idea that he is not enough of his position.

That power that he thinks that he has is very very deserted. So, the other irony in sir Mohanlal's world is this. He thinks that his language is a powerful weapon, his accent his command over the English language is something that is very very powerful and it will get things done but that is not the case as we can see in the story. So, he despite his usage of the oxford accent and he does not what he wants.

In fact in the soldiers think that they are mistaken when they hear perfect English is spoken by this native. So, this language does not exercise any kind of authority when spoken by a native Indian. So, there is false authority, there is a false sense of authority in sir Mohan Lal's identity.

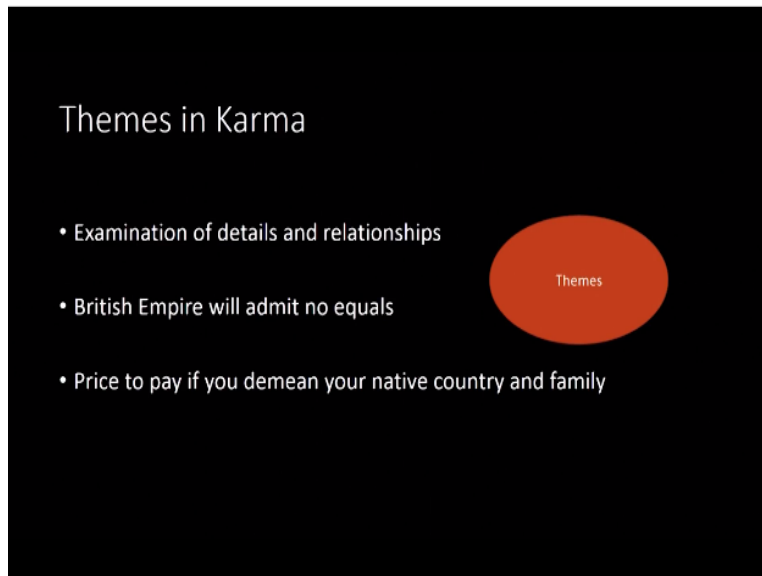
**(Refer Slide Time: 31:39)**



Now there is also greater irony in the fact that even though these 2 soldiers these 2 drunk soldiers are entitle to travel only in the second class. In this story they appear to be the most powerful they have the power to throw a barrister and a (( )) (31:55) sir Mohan Lal out of the train compartment. So, it is in these 2 drunken English soldiers the British empire is represented.

The identity of the British empire is communicated through these 2 English soldiers not through civilise English gentlemen who treat others fairly and squarely. So, the British empire is just to pose so these 2 drunken soldiers against native officials who arrogantly think that they are in command on in particular spaces whereas they are not that is communicated clearly through the unfolding of events in the story.

**(Refer Slide Time: 32:39)**



Now how do we work out the themes in this story, themes become clear when we analyse and the details in the story and when we analyse the characters identity. The characters behaviour and actions and through the relationships that are manifested in this story. So, the some of the themes that are present in the story are these that is the British empire will admit no equals even though it appears to in the state that is the fact.

So, sir Mohan Lal mistakenly thinks that he is part of the higher society of the British upper class but in fact he is not. And that is made quite clear that the empire will treat nobody as they are equal, no body especially from the native continent. And the other interesting and important theme is that you will have to pay a price if you demean your own native country and family.

So, these are some of the themes that are present in the story I would also like to pick up on the idea of anthropomorphism in karma which is evident quite early on the section that I want to talk about happens when sir Mohan Lal is in the waiting room.

**(Refer Slide Time: 34:01)**

## Anthropomorphism in Karma

- 'You are so very much like everything else in this country, inefficient, dirty, indifferent,' he murmured.
- The mirror smiled back at Sir Mohan
- 'You are a bit of all right, old chap, it said. 'Distinguished, efficient—even handsome...'

Mirrors are very sharp

The first class waiting room and he looks at his impression his image on the mirror on the wall and the mirror is cracking. And he says that you are so very much like everything else in this country inefficient dirty indifferent, he murmured. So, he uses the mirror to talk about the country itself, just as the mirror is crumbling and is damage. So, is this country and it is inefficiency and indifference are kind of associated or connected to the 1 or condition of the mirror.

And it is interesting to see the imagination of the author he will because he makes the mirror as if it is smiling backs. So, the mirror almost smile back in the mirror smile the back at sir Mohan and it seems as if the mirror says that you are bit of alright old chap it said. So, the mirror is seems to respond and the mirror says you are distinguish you are efficient and you are even handsome.

So, we have this anthropomorphic effect here in this particular scene and it is important to notice that mirrors make very short observations here in terms of judging the physical appearance and the mental capacity of this particular central character.

**(Refer Slide Time: 35:40)**

## Questions to explore

- What was your most favourite scene?
- What is the most interesting exchange of dialogues in the story?
- Why?
- What is the most important message in the story for you?

Now some of the questions that we can explore in this story is to think about what towards the most important or the most favourite scene for you having the where at the story what seems stay with you when you finish reading the story, what is the most interesting exchange of dialogues in this story you can even consider the scene that we have just seen here, the conversation between a mirror and a human being .

So, how do interpret this very symbolic scene, so these are some of the questions that you can ask why do you find certain things interesting, why do you find certain exchanges interesting why?. So, you might want to work out the answers for these questions and see the factors that please you or that annoy you or irritate you, what is the most important message in the story for you? Where does this message beside in terms of the story?

**(Refer Slide Time: 36:44)**



## Questions to explore further in *Karma*

- Is this an escapist story?
- Is it realistic?
- What is the most enjoyable element in the story?

The other question that you might want to ask is this, is this an escapist story? Does this story make you forget about your difficult circumstances or your pressing responsibilities does it make you forget all the obligations. So, is this an escape story a feel good story or it certain realistic story does it make you think deeply about the issues that affect you, once you have read this story.

And finally you can ask what is the most enjoyable element in the story, is it generation, is it the character, is it some of the scenes or is it the crisis in this story. Thank you for watching, I will catch up with you in the next lecture.