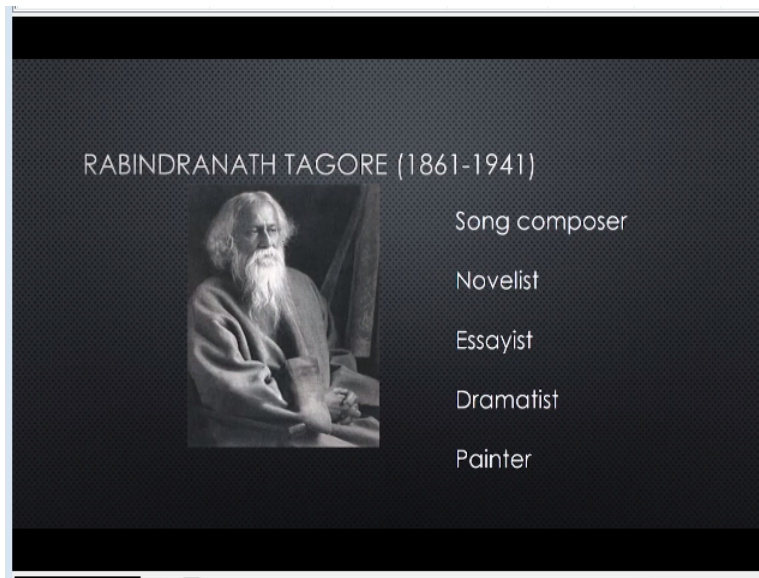


Short Fiction in Indian Literature
Prof. A. Divya
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology-Madras

Lecture-3
Plotting Tagore's story "Kabuliwala" (1892)

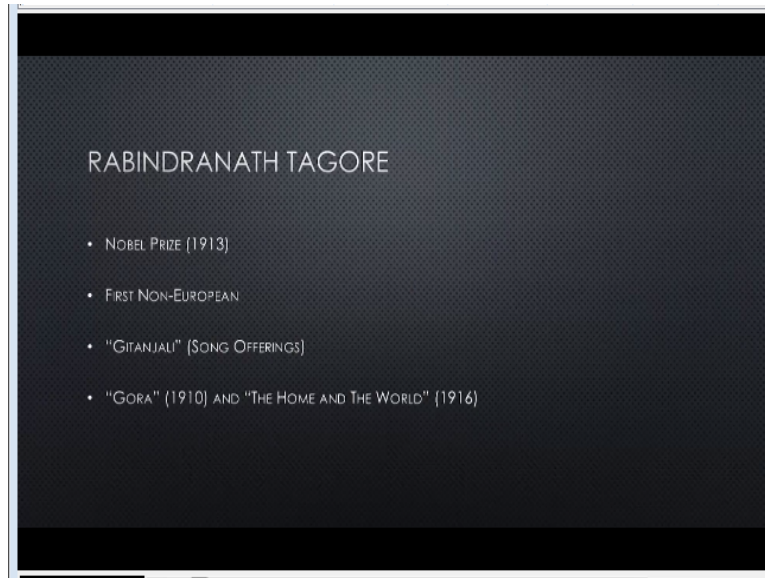
Hello and welcome to this lecture on plotting Tagore's story Kabuliwala, this story we should in 1892. So, we are going to take look at this 19th century short fiction by Tagore for today's lecture. Rabindranath Tagore needs no introduction for an Indian audience but nevertheless let me give you a very brief summary of some of the height points of his career.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:42)



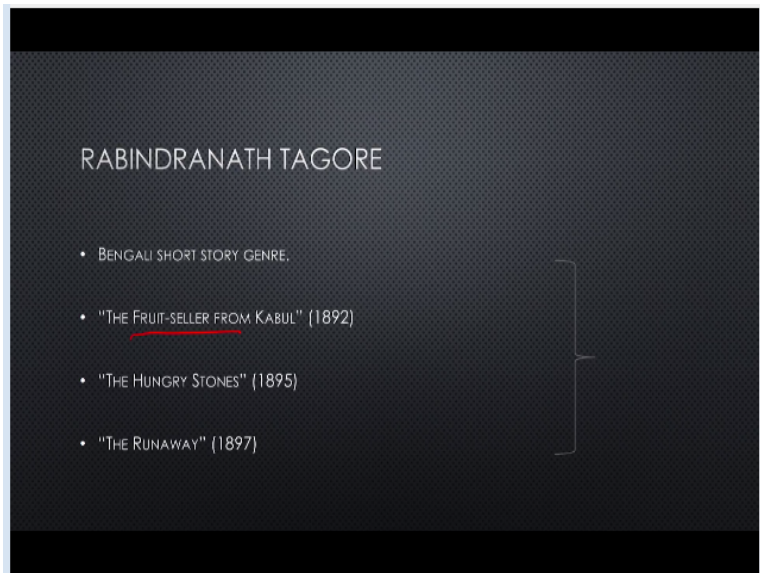
Tagore was a polymath, he was a song composer, he was a Novelist, he was an essayist, he was a Dramatist and he was also a painter. He was very very creative and that was well acknowledge by the rest of the world. In fact he won the Noble prize in 1913.

(Refer Slide Time: 00:58)



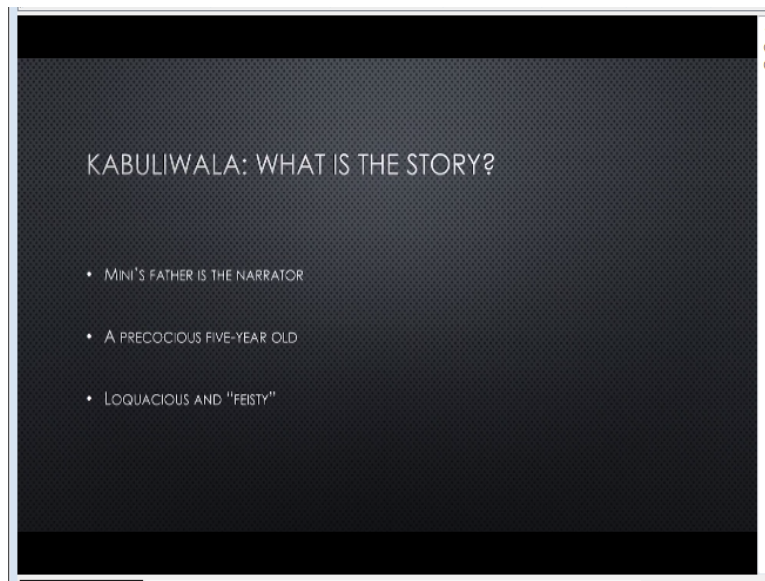
And in fact he was the first Non-European to do so and his song collection for Gitanjali was extremely popular and both in India and across the world. And 2 of the Novels that are very very well known are Gora published in 1910 and the home and the world published in 1916.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:20)



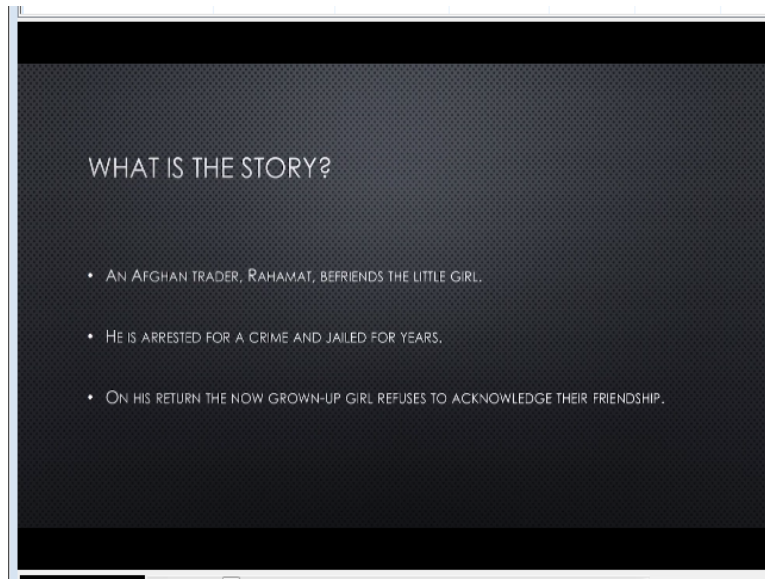
Tagore was also awarded a Knighthood in 1915 by the British Empire but he rejected it in 1919 as a protest against the Amritsar violence that is Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre in 1919. Tagore was known as the innovator of the Bengali short story genre and 3 of the short fiction from the 19th century of very very well known. They are The Fruit-Seller From Kabul is the Kabuliwala The Hungry Stones from 1895 and The Runaway, all these have a lot of profundity in terms of their analysis of the lowest of the low.

(Refer Slide Time: 01:58)



Mini's father is the narrator of the story and this story is about a precocious highly intelligent 5 year old little girl called Mini. She is very talkative that is why the father called as loquacious and feisty as well very spirited little girl.

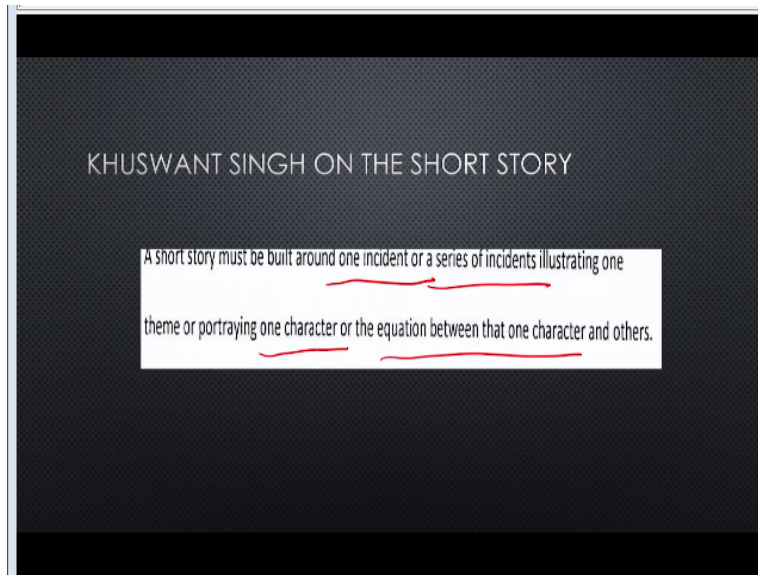
(Refer Slide Time: 02:17)



An Afghan trader called Rahamat be friends this little girl, he makes friends with her one fine day. And later on he is arrested for a crime and he is jailed for years and he is away for a lot of time from this story. And once he returns he meets this grownup girl and she refuses to acknowledge their friendship, that is basically the Bayer bounce of the story Kabuliwala. Now if

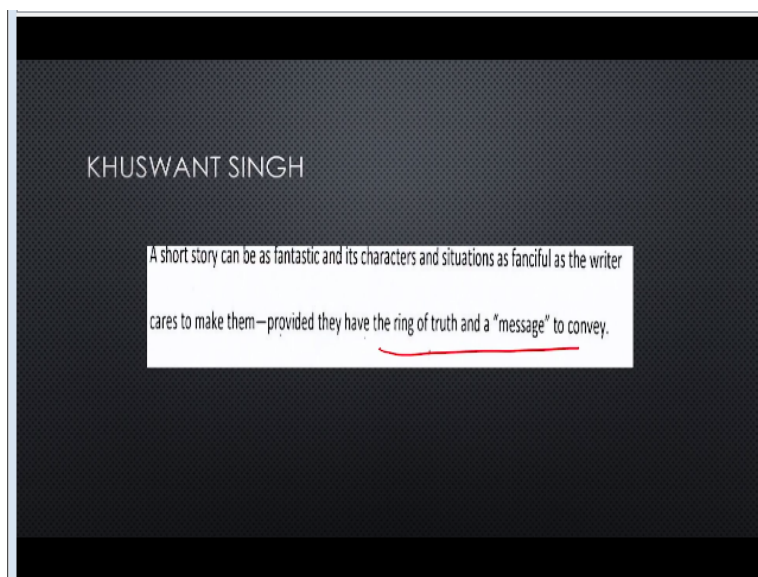
we analyze the story in relation to Khuswant Singh's theories of a great short story what are the results that we would get from it.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:51)



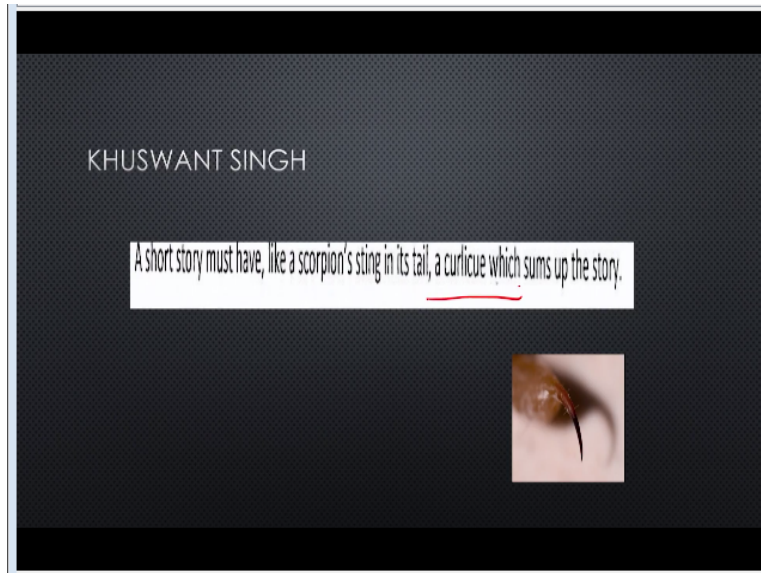
If we recall Khuswant Singh's first point about a great short story, he says that a short story must be built around 1 incident or a series of incidents illustrating 1 theme or portraying 1 character or the equation between that 1 character and others. It should be either one incident or a series of incident about a central idea or it could be about 1 character and the relationship between that 1 character and the rest of the society.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:30)



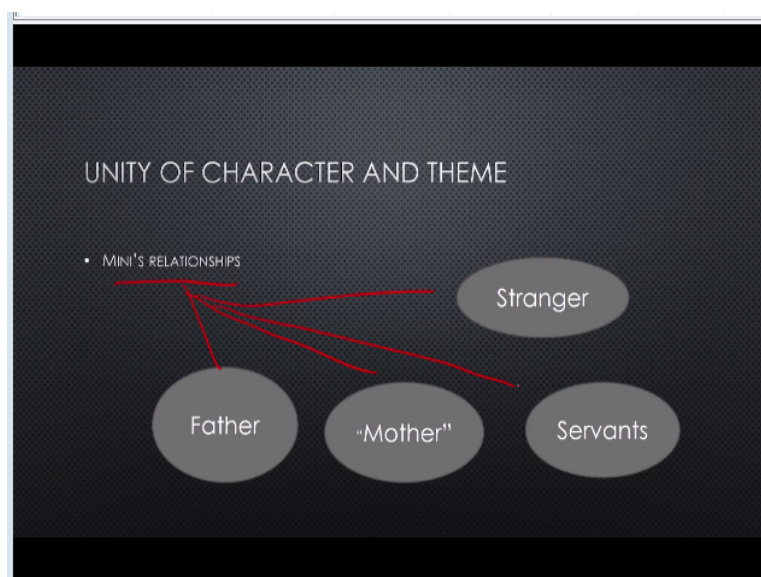
The second theory that he has suggested is that a story can be very fantastic it can be as fantastic as possible. And its characters and situations can be as realistic as they like it to be but they should have the ring of truth and a message to convey. And the last theory that he has about a classic short story is that it must have a twist like a scorpion's sting in its tail.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:52)



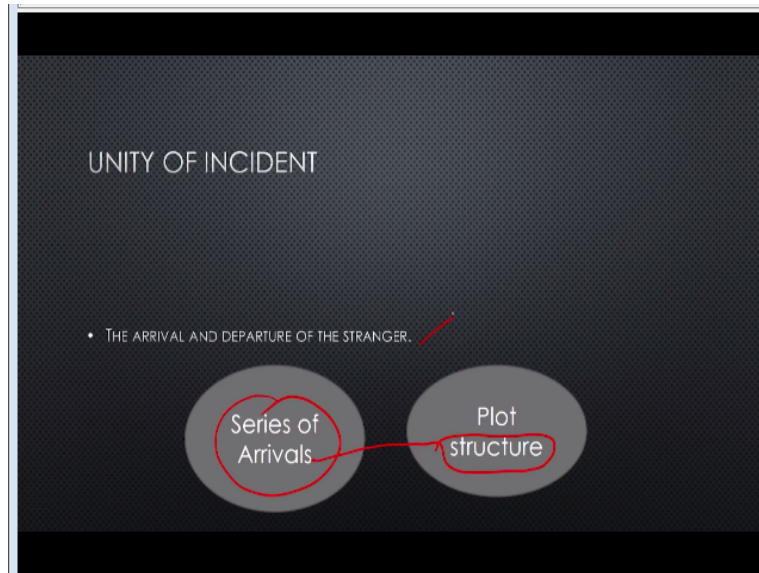
A curlicue is a curl which would sum up the major concern of the story, so let us keep all these major points of Khuswant Singh about a classic short story and apply it to Kabuliwala Tagore's short fiction from 1892.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:13)



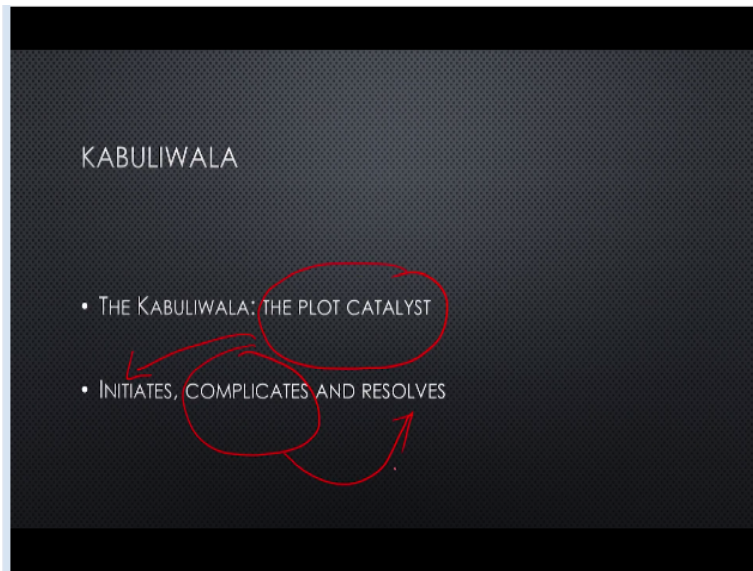
So, this story is about Mini's relationships the little girl's relationships with her father, with her mother, with the stranger Rahamat, the fruit-seller from Kabul and with the servants. So, it is about Mini therefore there is a unity of character there in this story and it justifies Khuswant singh's point about a classic short story. And there is also importantly unity of incident.

(Refer Slide Time: 04:42)



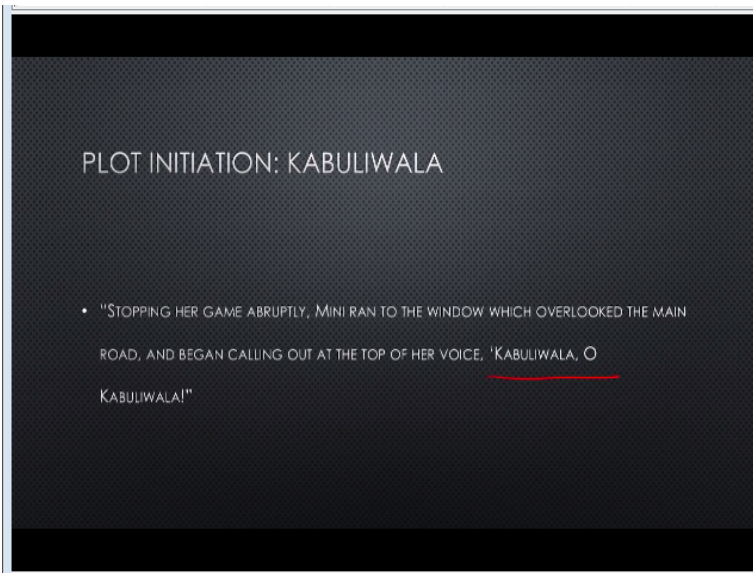
And there is also importantly unity of incident, so what is this unity of incident that we have in Kabuliwala. This story revolves around the series of arrivals made by the stranger called Rahamat. And this series of arrivals structures the plot of this story that something we need to keep in mind. So, the arrival and the departure of the stranger is crucial for the narrative functions of this story.

(Refer Slide Time: 05:18)



In other words we can call the Kabuliwala as the plot catalyst itself because this figure this stranger from Kabul initiates the plot that is he sets the plot rolling. He complicates the plot that is he offers crisis in the story and he is also helpful in resolving the plot. He brings some kind of resolution to the story as well at the end of it. So, he is crucial for the story world.

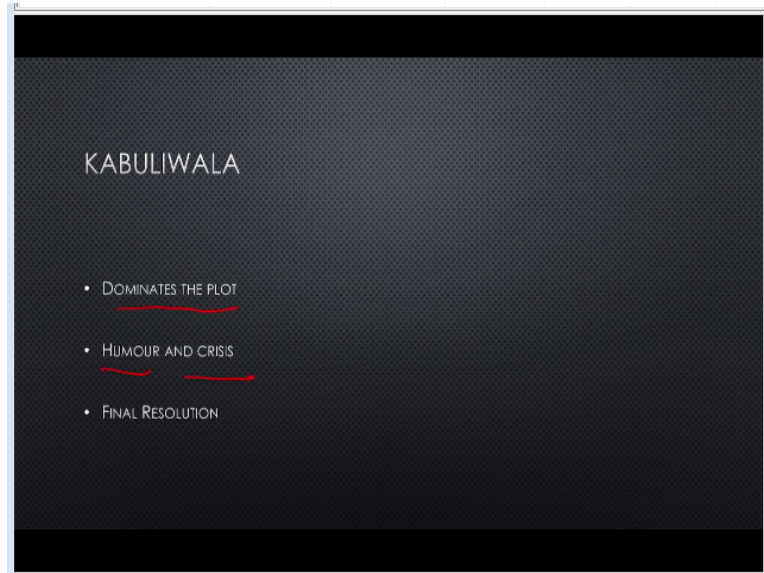
(Refer Slide Time: 05:48)



Now let us look at how exactly he initiates the story, so at the beginning of the story we see Mini playing in her father's studio or study where he write stories Mini's father is a writer. So, Mini's spends lot of time in her father's study, so one fine day she starts a game abruptly Mini ran to the window which overlook the main road. And began calling out at the top of her voice Kabuliwala O Kabuliwala that is the actual beginning of the story.

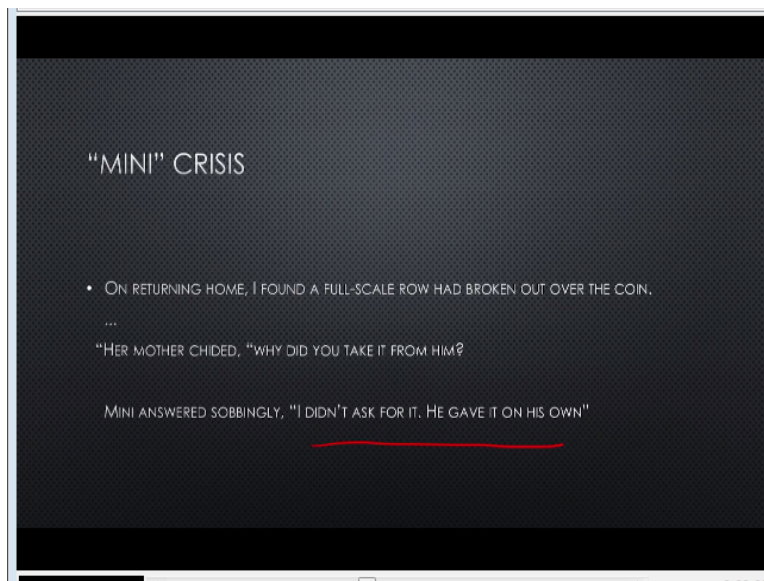
And from this point on the story picks up and becomes very very energize, so to speak once he arrives Kabuliwala begins to dominate the plot.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:31)



In fact he offers the flesh and bones of this story, he offers both humor and he offers crisis as well. And as I said he also helps in bringing the plot to a finale or a conclusion through his intervention and intrusion into the world of Mini, let us look at an example of the crisis.

(Refer Slide Time: 06:56)

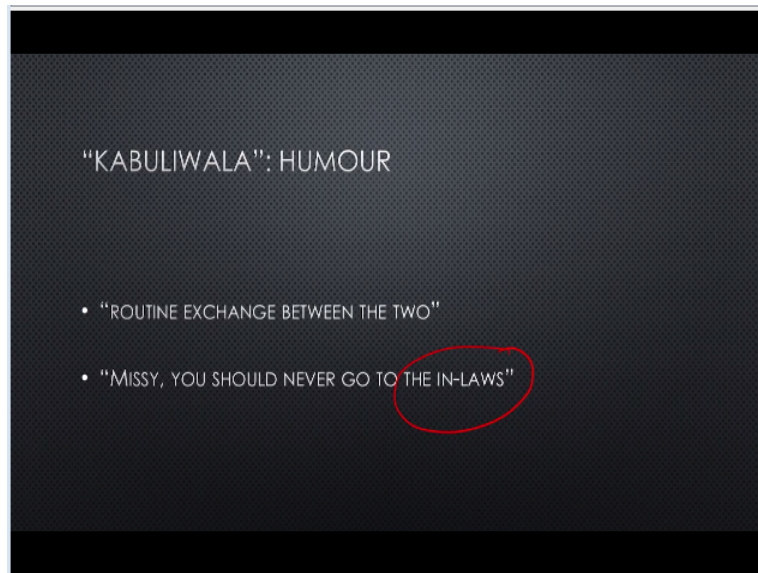


One of the Mini crisis that the Kabuliwala offers in the story. So, one day when the father is away the Kabuliwala rise and the Kabuliwala and Mini spent time together. And apparently the

Kabuliwala had given the little girl some dry fruits and raisins and the father on realizing this offers money to the Kabuliwala and then he goes away. Later he realizes that the daughter is given the coin back by the Kabuliwala and there is a full-scale row about it.

So, the father on returning home finds a full-scale row had broken out over the coin. 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. So, the Kabuliwala returns the coin that he had received from the father as a payment for the goods that he delivered the child. So, for this the mother is instance and she chides the little girl for getting the money from the stranger, so that is one of the Mini crisis in the story.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:12)



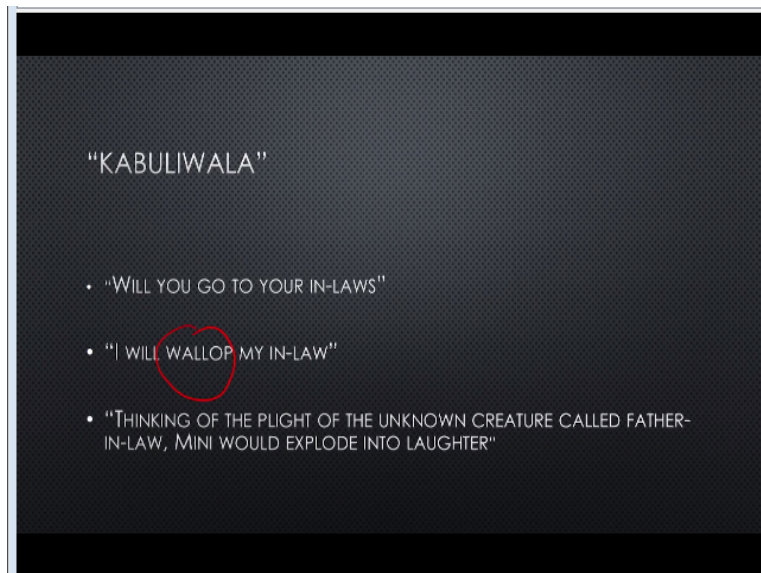
Now let us look at the humor that the Kabuliwala offers a humor that is full of significance in terms of a interpretation of the story. So, one of the routine exchange between the 2 is about the in-laws and Kabuliwala tells the little girl Missy you should never go to the in-laws. And this little girl is five-year old does not know what exactly is the meaning of the in-laws. The father says being very modern being a very progressive family.

(Refer Slide Time: 08:38)



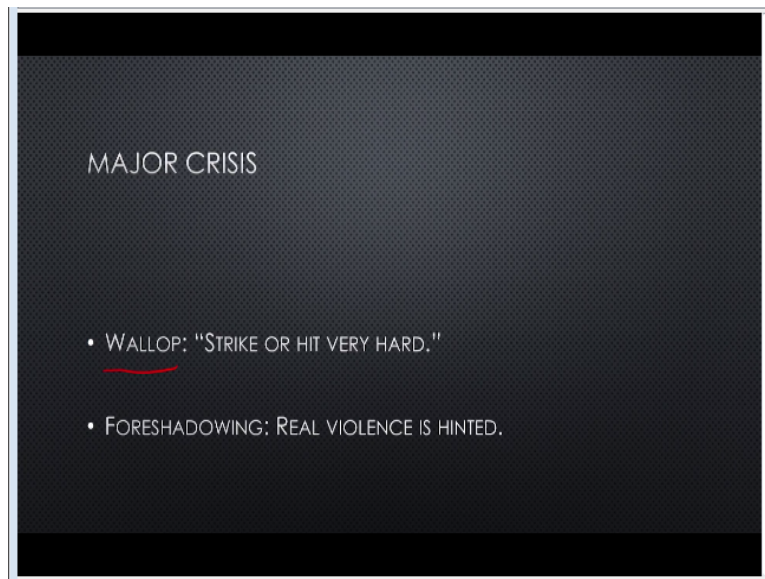
We chose not to load a daughter's mind with precocious thoughts at such a tender age. So, they did not want to explain to the little child, what exactly or who are the in-laws and what exactly is the in-laws home mean for a girl. So, this girl on hearing this phrase in-laws from Kabuliwala turns that statement into a question.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:02)



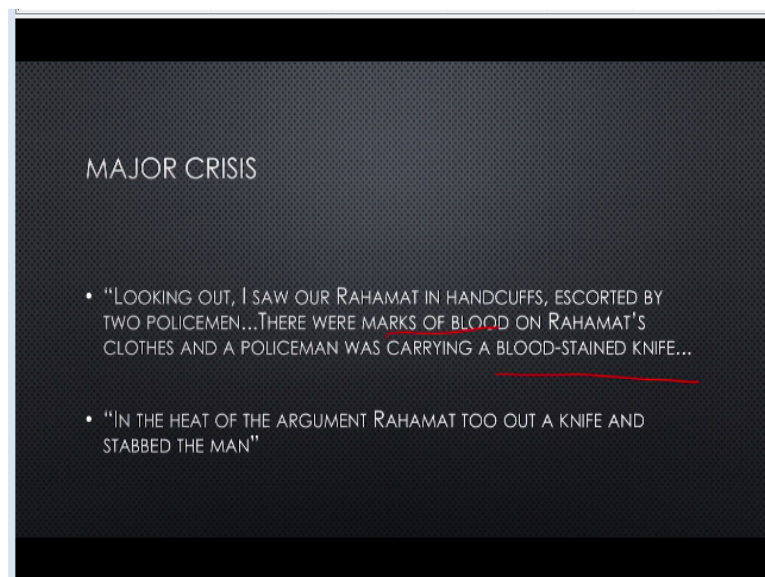
And asks will you go to your in-laws and the Kabuliwala says I will wallop my in-law, wallop my in-law is strike. I will strike my in-law and this little girl thinking about the plight of the unknown creature called father-in-law she would explode into laughter. So, this is a source of fund for the little kid because she does not know who are the in-laws and what is an in-laws place

(Refer Slide Time: 09:33)



And we need to take a second look at this word wallop because wallop is something there is hating someone very hard. It is a very violent action and it is very interesting because there is foreshadowing in the use of the term. And that foreshadowing suggest that real violence is going to happen it some point or the other in the story.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:58)

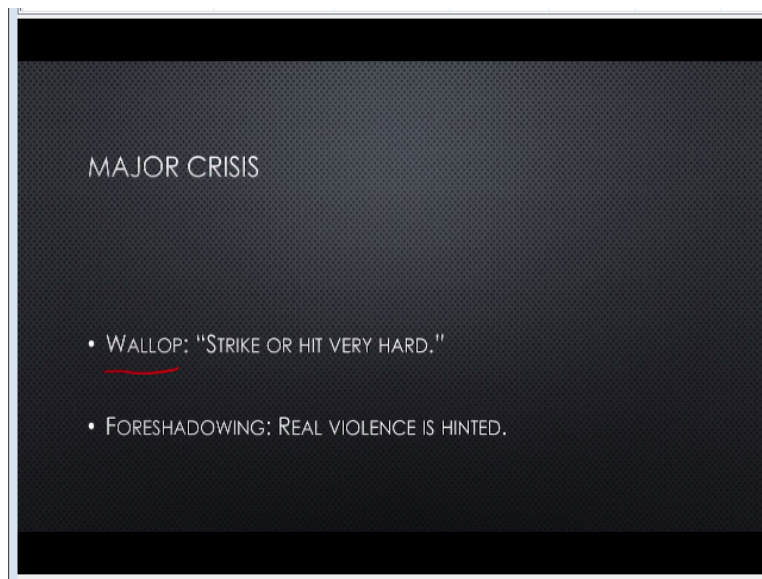


Now let us we have seen the minor crisis and now let us look at the major crisis and this story. Because it offers a turning point and this crisis takes the Kabuliwala from the story into another place looking out, I saw this is the view that the father receives or sees from his study. So, he

looks out of the window and sees Rahamat in hand cuffs escorted by 2 police man there are marks of blood on Rahamat's clothes.

And a police man was carrying a blood stained knife, so there is a clear suggestion that Rahamat has been involved in serious crime. Because there are marks of blood and there is a blood stained knife is well this is very interesting as I said.

(Refer Slide Time: 10:50)



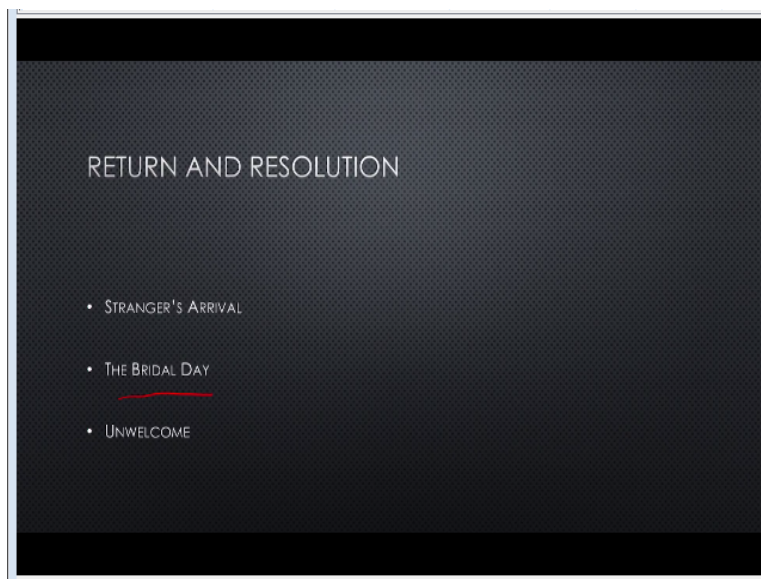
Because earlier we had a hint of the violence to come on the part of Rahamat through his choice of words. So, the story is this Rahamat apparently had sold a shawl to a neighbor of Mini's father. And the neighbor refuses to pay and there is a quarrel and a fight between Rahamat and the neighbor and in the heat of the argument. Rahamat took out a knife and stabbed the man. So, this is a major crisis in the story because Rahamat is arrested and he is jailed for grievous injury for committing grievous injury.

(Refer Slide Time: 11:31)



So, the Kabuliwala departs from the narrative world the story from the world of Mini. And Mini grows up and in the process growing up she replaced all her elderly male friends with girls of her own age. She was hardly to be seen in her father's studio that is the very very interesting overlapped between the Kabuliwala 's departure. And Mini's leaving her father's studio resolution as I said is offered by the Kabuliwala himself.

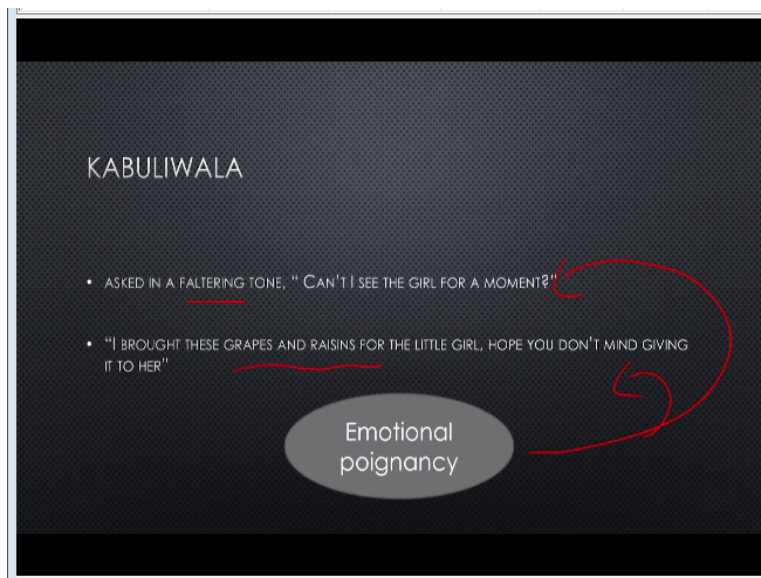
(Refer Slide Time: 12:05)



When he returns to the story world **one** once he comes back to the narrator the strange arrives very interestingly and significantly on the bridal day of Mini. And the father immediately makes him unwelcome because he is a man who is out of place in that celebratory world at Mini's home. So, he tells the Kabuliwala that he cannot made anybody on this particular day and the

man who is about to leave asks pleadingly in a faltering tone in a very very pathetic tone, cannot see the girl for a moment.

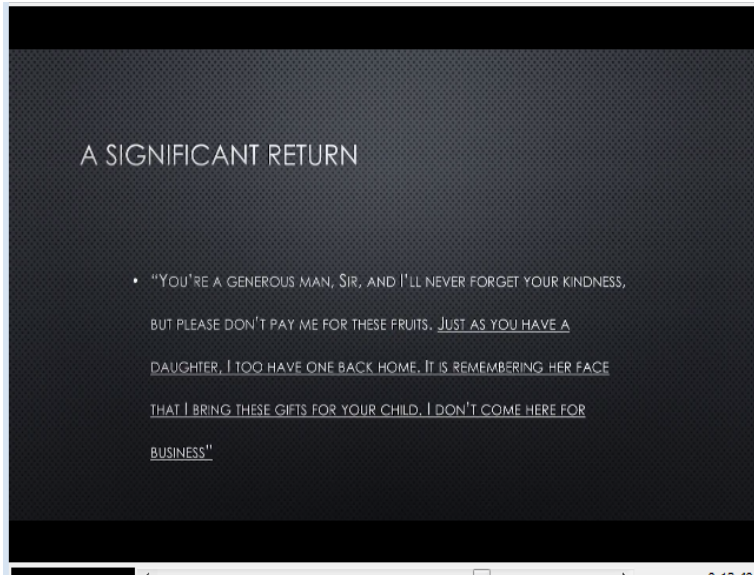
(Refer Slide Time: 12:41)



And he tells the father that I brought these grapes and raisins for the little girl, hope ou do not mind giving it to her. This offer this very generous offer and offer that's touch with the born that he had for Mini the love and a affection that this stranger had for Mini changes something in the heart of the father, as you can see that this stranger is a emotionally attached to his little daughter whom he does not envision as a grown up girl at this point.

So, this emotional poignancy in the request of the Kabuliwala to the father makes the father change his mind. So, the father orders the girl to come to the studio.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:39)

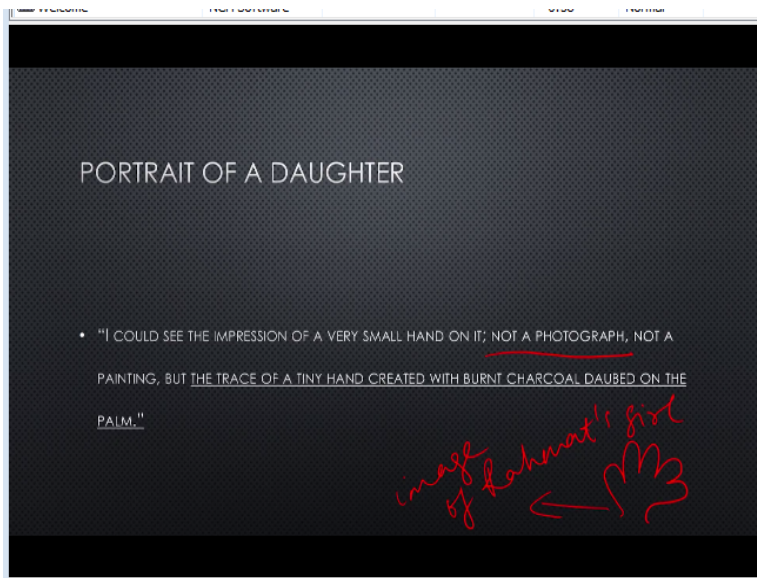


And before that happens the father of his money to the Kabuliwala for the raisins and the fruits are here brought for the girl. And the Kabuliwala response by saying your generous man, Sir and I will never forget your kindness. But please do not pay me for these fruits just as you have a daughter, I too have one back home. It is remembering her face that I bring these gifts for your child. I do not come here for business, for the first time we get to hear from the Kabuliwala's own one about his family.

His family that he had left behind in Kabul especially about a little daughter who apparently resembles Mini's age. So, he says it is because of her memory that I bring these gifts to your child and that it is not business that he has after in offering all these edible stuff to the little girl. and what he does is this is even more significant is than the words that he had spoken before what man from Kabul thus is, he shows Mini's father.

The impression of very small on it, he takes a small piece of paper whether is an impression of a very small hand on it.

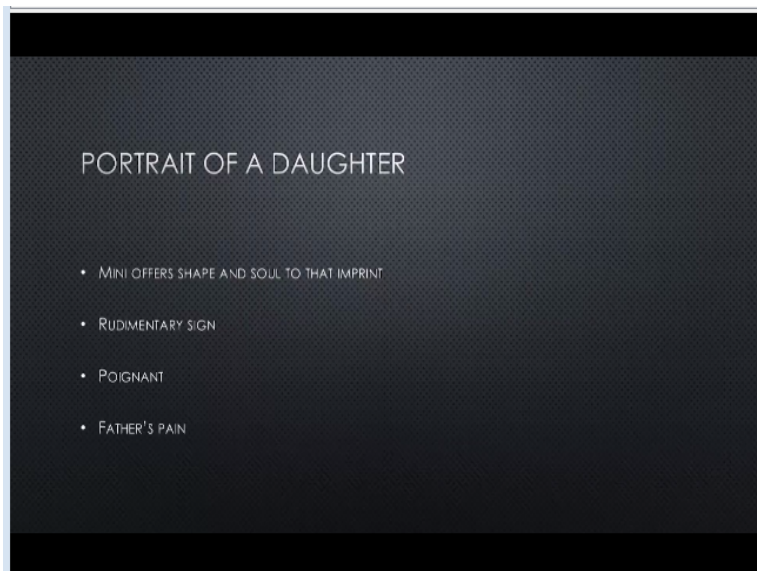
(Refer Slide Time: 15:02)



And it is not a photograph something we that we need to keep in mind it is not as expensive as a photograph. But it is just not even a painting, it is not even a painting but the trace of a tiny hand created with burnt charcoal and daubed on the palm. So, it is like a imprint of a small hand which has been traced by charcoal and daubed. So, this stands in for the image of the little girl of Rahamat.

And this scene and this moment in the story has a lot of emotional punch to it, when he reveals this photograph very rudimentary image to Mini's father. And when and we can see that Mini offers shape and so soul to that imprint.

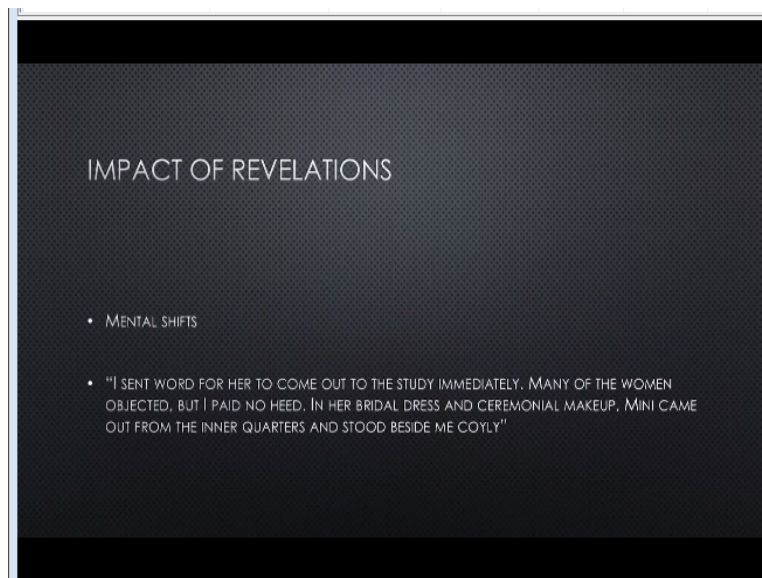
(Refer Slide Time: 16:02)



Because the real girl is not with Rahamat, so instead what he does is he replaces his own daughter with Mini who becomes sort of surrogate for the Kabuliwala's daughter. So, this is a rudimentary sign the images of rudimentary sign of the real daughter. But at the same time it has a lot of poignancy to it and it captures the father's pain as well. So, this rudimentary sign has 2 functions one is to talk about the daughter the missing daughter, the absence daughter of Rahamat.

And the other is to convey the loss or the absence of the daughter and the pain that the father undergoes because of that loss.

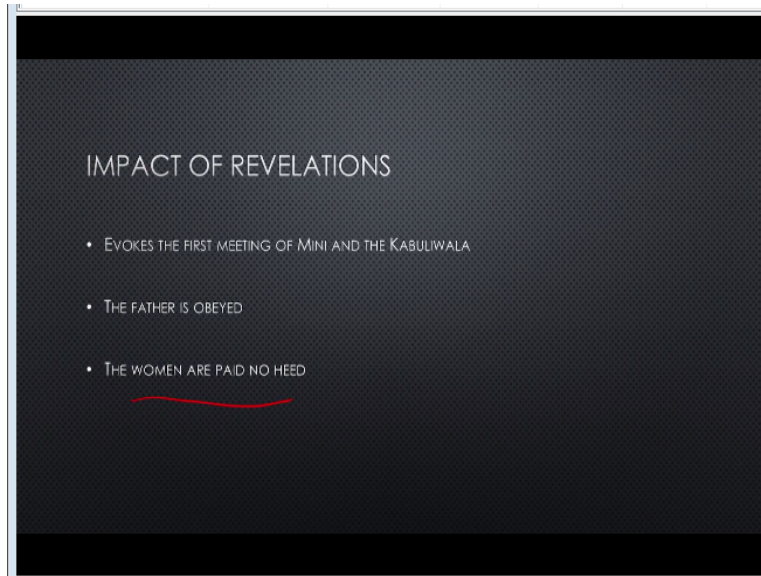
(Refer Slide Time: 16:51)



So, these words contain a lot of impact in terms of narrator, so it creates certain shifts, certain changes in the mind of Mini's father. So, as I said what he does is upon hearing Rahamat what the father does is he sends word for her to come out to the study immediately many of the women objected. But I paid no heed in her bridal dress and ceremonial makeup Mini came out from the inner quarters and stood beside me coyly.

So, on the bridal day the father's sends word for the daughter to come and meet a person who is a stranger to Mini in that household only the father and Mini would probably recognize the man. So, this meeting after long time evokes the first meeting of Mini and the Kabuliwala.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:41)



When the girl very suspiciously stands beside her father and seeks protection from him. So, this second meeting evokes the very first meeting ages ago and this scene is very interesting. Because despite circumstances in which the meeting is organized and despite the circumstances of the wedding the father is obeyed when he asks the daughter to come in meet this stranger.

And it is very interesting to know that the women are paid no heed their objections are swept aside by this very authoritative figure of the father. Thank you for watching, I will catch up with you in a next session.