

Twentieth-Century Fiction
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Lecture - 57
The Chess Players - Part 2

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It was in the times of Wajid Ali Shah. Lucknow was drowned in sensuality. The big and small, the rich and the poor – all were sunk in it. Some were engrossed in dance and music; some just revelled in the drowsiness induced by opium. Love of pleasure dominated every aspect of life. In administration, in literature, in social life, in arts and crafts, in business and industry, in cuisine and custom – sensuality ruled everywhere. The state officials were absorbed in fun and pleasure, poets in descriptions of love and separation, artisans in *zari* and *chikan* work, businessmen in dealings in surma, perfumes and cosmetics. All were drowned in sensual pleasures. No one knew what was happening around the world. Quail fights were on. Rings were being readied for partridge fights. Somewhere the game of *chausar* was being played, with its attendant shouts on the winning throw. Elsewhere a pitched chessboard battle was on. From the king to the pauper – all were engrossed in these pleasures. So much so, that if beggars received money in alms, they preferred to spend it on opium or its extract rather than bread. 'Playing games like chess or cards or ganjifa sharpens the mind, improves mental faculties and helps in solving complex problems.' Such arguments were being forcefully advanced. (People subscribing to this thesis can be found even today.) So if Mirza Sajjad Ali and Mir Roshan Ali spent most of their time sharpening their wits, how could any thoughtful person take exception. Both of them were hereditary Jagirdars, free from the worries of a livelihood; they enjoyed their good food without having to work at all. What else could they do?

Every morning, after breakfast, both the friends would spread the chessboard, set up the pieces and engage themselves in the tactics of chessboard warfare. They would forget whether it was noon, afternoon or evening. Repeated messages from inside that food was ready were ignored, and the cook was forced to serve food right there in the room, as the two friends continued their play. There were no elders in Mirza Sajjad Ali's family; as a result the game was played in his *devan khana*. However, members of Mirza's family were far from pleased. Not to speak of the family, even the neighbours and servants made uncharitable comments: 'This is an inauspicious game and can ruin families. God forbid that anyone should get addicted, for it makes a person unfit to do anything. It's a serious



So, hello and welcome to this NPTEL course entitled Twentieth Century Fiction. We were looking at the final text of this course which is Munshi Premchand's, The Chess Players, so Shatranj ke Khiladi. So, we had an introductory lecture on this course, this text already and we will just move on with the text, but just to very quickly rehearse some of the things we have discussed already.

The historical setting of the story is very important, it is right before the Sepoy rebellion. It is when the company was ruling different parts of India and they were taking over different kingdoms financially by lending them money and then rendering them bankrupt in the process. And it is also about the setting of Lucknow - the kind of political, cultural, social, and masculine order in Lucknow at that point of time, which is extremely feudal, hedonistic, irresponsible and you know self indulgent and narcissistic to a large extent which was completely disconnected from anything outside this little bubble of Lucknow. It was very unrealistic, very irresponsible and then we find that you know the entire

energy, the entire economy is driven towards excess, rather than a utility-centric economy.

So, you know we were told in the last class in the section that we read out from, even a beggar in Lucknow if he got some alms he would spend that on buying a you know opium or extracts of opium or essence of opium rather than bread. And the choice of opium over bread obviously is a very material signifier of the kind of collective imagination, the collective you know unconscious to a certain extent of Lucknow that point of time where people were geared towards hedonistic pleasure serving principles rather than productive principles.

So, the whole question of productivity becomes interestingly subverted over here. And we as we move on today we find that how the gender angle in the story becomes important as well. Because the men who were ruling Lucknow, the men who were supposed to administer Lucknow are obviously failing in their duties, the massive failure of men over here becomes obviously a problem for the women who were essentially imprisoned in the little prison houses of their households. And we find that the game of chess becomes a very symbolic game, a very symbolic ludic landscape which becomes a landscape of proxy attention, of proxy political attention, of proxy warfare, because the people are absorbed - the two men over here are obviously symptomatic of the masculinity in Lucknow.

They are completely absorbed in this game of chess, they are absorbed in the protecting and the attacking of other people's, opponent's, you know kings and queens and pawns and bishops and soldiers and that is where the attention is driven, towards the ludic landscape of the chess appeared rather than the real landscape or the political scene which is completely disregarded and complete denial of any real engagement at all.

So, when you see that the company takes over in the end, the army just marches in and takes over without any resistance whatsoever, right. So and that obviously is symptomatic or reflective of the lack of resistance, lack of political will, the lack of political action in Lucknow that point of time. And you know we have seen that you know we are told that this is a very decadent regime, that everything about Lucknow at this point of time is extremely decadent, extremely narcissistic, and these two, the Mir

and Mirza are obviously reflective, their actions are reflective of the inaction of Lucknow at the political scene, at the macro political scene, ok.

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Ali and Mir Roshan Ali spent most of their time sharpening their wits, how could any thoughtful person take exception. Both of them were hereditary Jagirdars, free from the worries of a livelihood; they enjoyed their good food without having to work at all. What else could they do?

Every morning, after breakfast, both the friends would spread the chessboard, set up the pieces and engage themselves in the tactics of chessboard warfare. They would forget whether it was noon, afternoon or evening. Repeated messages from inside that food was ready were ignored, and the cook was forced to serve food right there in the room, as the two friends continued their play. There were no elders in Mirza Sajjad Ali's family; as a result the game was played in his *devan khana*. However, members of Mirza's family were far from pleased. Not to speak of the family, even the neighbours and servants made uncharitable comments: 'This is an inauspicious game and can ruin families. God forbid that anyone should get addicted, for it makes a person unfit to do anything. It's a serious disease.' Mirza's begum was so hostile to the game that she would seek out occasions to berate her husband. But she rarely got this opportunity. The game would begin while she was still asleep, and Mirza would come inside only when she had gone to sleep. However, she would expend her ire upon the servants. 'Are they asking for paan? Tell them to come and take it themselves. Have they no time for food? Go and throw it to them. Let them eat or cast it to the dogs.' But face to face she was helpless. She wasn't resentful against her husband so much as against his friend, Mir sahib. She had named him Mir, the *spoilsport*. It is possible Mirza, to save his own skin, also threw all the blame on Mir sahib.

One day the begum had a severe headache. She said to her maid, 'Go and call Mirza sahib. They should go and bring medicine from a hakim. Run, be quick.'. Mirza sent the maid back saying he would follow. The begum was hot-tempered. She lost her patience.



And the final thing, the final sentence with which we ended in last class we were told that these people really do not have to work for a living because they are Jagirdars which means they are land owning people. And the money just comes into them through hereditary land you know someone works in some land somewhere; a farmer or you know maybe a crop producer and the money comes in as a rent and that is how they live off, they live off the rent paid to them by the different people who use the lands at different points of this kingdom, which means they do not have to work for a living they just spend the entire time entire day playing chess.

And again, the chess playing activity we can also look at it from a gender perspective, gender erotic angle there is an erotic quality about the chess playing the two men, they achieve a sense of intimacy and proximity with this game of chess, and it becomes more and more clandestine. It almost becomes a lovers' rendezvous as I mentioned in the last class when they are expelled from their homes they go find a place somewhere in the kingdom where they can find the space and time to play chess together.

So, this chess playing activity becomes a proxy activity for many things, for erotic relationships you know which do not happen in a heteronormative way. We are told that; we are never told anything about the children of these two men. So, again we are told,

we get this assumption that these two are unproductive men even in the biological sexual level. So, again the game of chess becomes a proxy activity even for that perspective. And also as I mentioned that becomes a proxy political activity in the sense that they control and maneuver, the kings and also the queens, and bishops and you know knights whereas, there is no attention whatsoever given to the real queens and real kings and also its knights and army which are completely disregarded.

So, if you look at the film I did mention the film in the last class. If you look at the film we are told that you know when the British came in, the company came in, they just came and took over the kingdom and you know some of the soldiers from the Nawab they actually went and joined the company's army for better wages for better you know facilities for better money, right.

So, because he is a lacking you know and there is a lot of resentment in the army, the Nawab's army at that point of time for not getting payment for not getting wages. So, all the mercenary soldiers they just joined the you know the British army because that was better in terms of an employment. So, in purely level of employment the army with the British were better, right.

So, all these you know being the setting in the story we find that now we come to the focus of attention, of the story which is about these two men playing chess and hence the title of the story The Chess Players, right. So, chess playing as I mentioned could be interpreted in various ways and that is something we should bear in mind while reading the story.

Now, let us take a look at the text over here which should be on your screen. And we are told, we are given a detailed description in terms of how the chess playing takes place and this obsessive quality about chess playing is something which is hinted at, at the very beginning which is again it may be connected to some kind of a quasi erotic activity because these people cannot just live without chess, they have to meet each other, they have to play chess with each other for hours and hours endlessly.

Sometimes, you know almost all the times completely you know not taking care of any responsibility at home, in the political scene, in their kingdoms, nothing of that sort takes place, they only play chess throughout the day. And so, we just read this section, and we will go and unpack it later. And this should on your screen.

Every morning, after breakfast, both the friends would spread the chessboard, set up the pieces and engage themselves in the tactics of chessboard warfare. So, again chessboard warfare becomes the only tactic that they are engaging in at any level of seriousness.

They would forget whether it was noon, afternoon or evening. Repeated messages from inside the food was ready were ignored, and the cook was forced to serve food right there in the room as the two friends continued their play.

So, again that dewan khana, or the drawing room, so as it were becomes a very symbolic space. And again, we can do a very interesting space study of Shatranj Ke Khilari because you know the dewan khana or the drawing room is where we meet strangers, where, it is not really a private room, it is a part of the house, but at the same time you see public part of a private house which is where the game of chess takes place. It is not really inside the house, and the fact that they are not situated inside the house, they are never situated inside the house, they are always outside playing game of chess. Means that they are completely ignoring their private duties towards the home and were also ignoring the public duties towards the political sphere.

So, the dewan khana becomes some kind of a liminal space between the private and the public where the two men inhabit all the time playing proxy game of chess, this proxy war of chess all the time endlessly. And we are told that they also would sometimes ignore food, they would not eat for hours and they would ignore any calls of food from inside the house and just go on playing forever, ok.

The two friends continued to play. There were no elders in Mirza Sajjad Ali's family; as the result the game was played in his dewan khana. So, because there was no elders, the game was played the game was played in the dewan khana, the drawing room, where strangers would be you know greeted and met. However, members of Mirza's family were far from pleased. Not to speak of the family, even the neighbours and servants made uncharitable comments. Which, what were the comments? "This is an inauspicious game that can ruin families as a serious disease."

So, again we find there is a pathological quality about this obsessive chess playing that these two men indulge in, right. So, we are told that these two people played chess endlessly and the neighbours also comment very disparagingly on this activity. And they are told that this is a decadent game that can ruin family's etcetera.

Mirza's, begum, the wife of Mirza was so hostile to the game that she would seek out occasions to berate her husband. But she rarely got this opportunity. The game would begin while she was still asleep and Mirza would come inside only when she had gone to sleep.

So, again there is hardly any connect between the husband and the wife over here at any level, conjugal level. So, we find that the he would spend most of his time outside in the chess game, you know playing game of chess in the drawing room, and he would very rarely come inside and when he would come inside by the time she would fall asleep and he would leave again when she was still sleeping. So, as you can see there is a complete failure, a crisis of communication between the begum and Mirza over here, ok.

However, she would expend her ire upon the servants. "Are they asking for paan? Tell them to come and take it themselves. Have they no time for food? Go and throw it to them. Let them eat or cast it to the dogs." But face to face she was helpless. She was not resentful against her husband so much as against his friend, Mir sahib. She had named him Mir, the spoilsport. It is possible Mirza, to save his own skin, also threw all the blame on Mir sahib.

So, again we find that it almost becomes an erotic triangle over here, where Mirza's wife has complained that she does not get time that with her husband all the time. And she is blaming it for Mir, and she is saying that Mir sahib comes and takes away my husband and they endlessly play this game of chess you know in the drawing room forever. And she keeps, she gives him nicknames, she gives him names which are very unflattering. She names him spoilsport, someone who comes and spoils all the fun. So, again the erotic angle is accentuated.

But, you know despite her resentment, we find that she is essentially helpless as a woman, and this is where the helplessness or the agency-less-ness of the woman comes in very compellingly and very painfully in the story where she is taking it out on servants telling them to go and insult them and throw the food at their face because they are not coming in to have the food. But she knows she can do no such thing because that will be a complete disturbance of the decorum of the house which is essentially you know a male-centric decorum, something which is designed to create comfort for the men, ok.

But she in a very micro way, in a very surreptitious way, in a very helpless way, in a very personal informal way would take out her resentment through the servants and would call all kinds of names to Mir. And we are also told the Mirza, her husband to save his own skin would throw all the blame on Mir would tell him that you know this is all his problem, it is all his fault, he comes to my house to play, what can I do. That will be the narrative that she he would produce in order to save himself from being humiliated by his wife, ok.

One day the begum had a severe headache. She said to the maid, 'Go and call Mirza sahib, they should go and bring medicine from the hakim. Run, be quick'. Hakim being a local doctor. That was a Lucknow term for doctor. So, she had a big headache and then she told the servant to go and bring Mirza sahib, and tell him to go to the hakim to fetch medicine from the doctor.

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How could her husband play chess while she had a headache? Her face became red with anger. She said to the maid, 'Go and tell *them* to come immediately, or I shall go to the hakim by myself.' Mirza was in the midst of a very absorbing game. Mir sahib would be checkmated just in two moves. He spoke in irritation, 'Is she on her last breath? Why can't she wait?'

Mir sahib interjected, 'Why don't you go? Women are delicate things.'

Mirza retorted, 'Oh yes, you want me to go because you're facing defeat in the next two moves.'

Mir said, 'My dear, don't be under any illusion. I have thought of a counter move that'll turn the tables on you. Go and attend to her. Why are you hurting her?'

'I won't go until I have checkmated you.'

'I won't make any moves. Go and attend to her.'

'My dear, I'll have to go to a hakim. There's no headache. This is just pretence to harass me.'

'Whatever it is, you'll have to go.'

'All right. Let me make one more move.'

'Not at all. I won't touch my pieces until you have gone and talked to her.'

When Mirza sahib went in, the begum changed her tactics and said, groaning with pain, 'You love this wretched game so much that you don't care even if I am dying. What kind of a man are you?'



Mirza sent the maid back saying that he would follow. The begum was hot-tempered. She lost her patience. How could her husband play chess when she had a headache? Her face became red with anger. She said to the maid, 'Go and tell them to come immediately, or I shall go to the hakim by myself.' Mirza was in the midst of a very absorbing game. Mir sahib would be checkmated just in two moves. He spoke in irritation, 'Is she on her last breath? Why cannot she wait?'

So, you find that this again becomes a very symbolic scene where Mirza's wife is in pain, she is in agony, and she wants her husband to come and comfort her and at least go out and get medicine for her. But he is refusing to do it because he is absorbed in the chess game. So, again we can see how the chess game becomes a complete absorbent over here which takes away all the tension, all the energy, the intellectual, physical, erotic energy all goes on the chess board as a result of which the wife, the spouse suffers.

And also this conjugal crisis becomes it becomes compounded by the gender situation in this particular setting because she knows that despite all her resentment it would be very inappropriate, it will be frowned upon, if she goes out in a public space without any male supervision, without a male company that would be almost unthinkable for a woman of her class, for a woman of her social prestige and position, to step out of the house without a male companion. So, she is now threatening to do it as a result of which Mirza's getting more and more irritated.

And his response, his retort is very obviously very callous and he says to the servant that, you know is she dying, why cannot she wait. Because he is more absorbed in the chess game and he is about to win. He is about to checkmate his competitor which is Mir sahib.

And Mir sahib now interjected, 'Why do not you go? Women are delicate things.'

So, again if we take a look at the vocabulary over here, the metaphor over here, the metaphors throughout the story, they are extremely sexist, they are extremely male centric which looks at a woman as some kind of a delicate thing to be protected which is obviously commodifying and patronizing. And also, it is a commentary on the social and cultural condition of Lucknow at that time, which is very feudal, very male centric, very male dominated woman had absolutely no agency, except in showing resentment to the servants inside the households. They could not even come to the drawing room without the male permission, because the drawing room was some kind of a liminal space as I mentioned between the public and the private space.

So, even that was forbidden space for them. All they could do is you know get furious in the kitchen, get furious in the bedroom, get furious in the servant room, and that was it, that was all the fury that was available to them, you know those little mapped spaces inside the house, very private you know spaces. We can see how even the spatial mappings in the story were discursive in quality, how the certain spaces which are male

and certain spaces which are female and the females cannot cross over, they rarely get a chance to cross over and access the male space.

And if you take a look at Mir sahib's interjection where he is saying well women are delicate things, right. So, the delicate quality is about, is almost like talking about a toy, a soft toy or something, a fragile toy which can break at any moment. So, men are supposed to protect the fragility of woman, who are hysteric and fragile and mercurial in quality.

Mirza retorted, 'Oh yes, you want me to go because you are facing defeat in the next two moves.'

Mir said, 'My dear, do not be under any illusion. I have thought of a counter move that I will turn the tables on you. Go and attend to her. Why are you hurting her? So, now, she is being used as a pawn by the two men to evade the game because Mir we are told is about to lose the game. So, he wants Mirza to go just so he can manoeuvre something on the chessboard and Mirza does not want to go because he wants to win the game. So, the wife is an irritant to him at the moment.

So, again look at the complete marginalization of women in this particular section. Women are just some kind of an irritant, an entity which is just there to irritate the men in a more absorbing game of chess. So, obviously it is a very sad depiction of the gender inequality, forget about agency, forget about any financial access or any access to economy or any access to political privilege, even within a domestic space women have absolutely no agency whatsoever, they are seen as an irritant by the men, who are otherwise more busy, and more absorbed in this proxy game of chess, ok. And then this conversation goes on.

'I will not go until I have checkmated you.'

'I will not make any moves. Go and attend to her.'

'My dear, I will have to go to hakim. There is no headache. This is just pretence to harass me.'

So, again this is seen as harassment by the man because he is obviously more busy playing a game of chess and the woman suffering from inside the house and asking him

to go and get some medicine from hakim is seen as an harassment to him because that will obviously be a departure from the game. So, we can see how the it is almost a very bipolar kind of a you know gender divide.

‘Whatever it is, you will have to go.’

‘All right. Let me make one more move.’

So, again this conversation goes on almost entirely about chess and that is something which is important for us to understand how the sickness of a woman is completely marginalized and the chess playing activity becomes more and more foregrounded and more and more accentuated, ok.

‘All right. Let me make me one more move.’

‘Not at all. I will not touch my pieces until you have gone and talked to her.’

When Mirza sahib went in the begum changed her tactics and said, groaning with pain, ‘You love this wretched game so much that you do not even care if I am dying. What kind of a man are you?’

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‘Whatever it is, you’ll have to go.’

‘All right. Let me make one more move.’

‘Not at all. I won’t touch my pieces until you have gone and talked to her.’

When Mirza sahib went in, the begum changed her tactics and said, groaning with pain, ‘You love this wretched game so much that you don’t care even if I am dying. What kind of a man are you?’

Mirza replied, ‘What could I do? Mir sahib wouldn’t let me go.’

‘Does he think all are as idle as he. He too has a family. Or has he finished them off?’

‘He’s such an addict. Whenever he comes I am forced to play.’

‘Why don’t you drive him away?’

‘He is my equal in age, and two fingers higher in rank. I have to oblige him.’

‘Ok, then I shall drive him away. What if he is offended? Does he feed us? Oh Haria, go and pick up the chessboard. And tell Mir sahib that Mirza sahib won’t play anymore. Tell him to go home.’

‘No, no! Don’t do anything of the kind. Would you have me humiliated? Oh Haria, stop. Don’t go.’

‘Why don’t you let her go? Anyone who stops her will drink my blood. All right, you stopped her. Let me see how you stop me.’

Saying this begum sahiba advanced angrily towards the *devran khana*. Mirza’s face turned pale. He began to plead with her. ‘For God’s sake. I bind you in the name of



So, now the question comes to his masculinity that what kind of a man are you, what kind of a heteronormative, married man are you that you can let your woman die, because you could play a game of chess. So, now, she reverses it and attacks him on his

masculinity, and obviously he is going to defend him by transferring all the blame to the other guy to the other person.

Mirza reply, 'What could I do? Mir sahib would not let me go.'

'Does he think that all are as idle as he. He too has a family. Or has he finished them off?'

'He is such an addict. Whenever he comes I am forced to play,' which is obviously a blatant lie. We know both of them are very willing players, but now he is transferring the blame to Mir sahib because you know he thinks that this is the way he can save his skin and stop himself from being humiliated by his wife however agency-less that might be from the wife's perspective.

'Why do not you drive him away?'

'He is equal in my age, and two fingers higher in rank. I have to oblige him.'

So, again this is a very telling comment on the feudal hierarchy, the feudal chain of hierarchy in Lucknow where everyone has a rank and the ranks are very clearly specified and mapped. So, we are told that Mir is two fingers just above Mirza in terms of ranking, so he has to oblige to me. So, whenever if he supposedly comes in and asks him or invites him to a game of chess he has to oblige, it is that kind of a coded culture of you know subservience and domination where the people up in rank ladder would have to have absolutely all agency to dominate and lay orders on the people who are below them in the ranking table will have to follow them you know no matter what their agency is.

'Ok, then I shall drive him away. What if he is offended? Does he feed us? Oh Haria, go and pick up the chessboard. And tell Mir sahib the Mirza sahib will not play anymore. Tell him to go home.'

'No, no. Do not do the anything of the kind. Would you have me humiliated? Oh Haria, stop. Do not go.'

'Why do not you let her go? Well, anyone who stops her will drink my blood. All right, you stopped her. Let me see how you stop me.' And this becomes a very dramatic scene where she actually goes towards the dewan khana.

You know we told that saying this begum sahiba advanced angrily towards the dewan khana. Mirza's face turned pale. He began to plead with her. 'For God's sake. I bind you in the name of Hazrat Hussain. You would see me dead if you went there.'

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Hazrat Hussain. You would see me dead if you went there.' But the begum was in no mood to listen. She walked up to the *dewan khana*, but she stopped. She wouldn't go in, in the presence of an outsider. She looked in but there was no one there. Mir sahib had displaced a few pieces on the board and had gone out for a stroll to show his innocence. The begum went inside and overturned the chessboard, threw some chessmen under the dewan and a few others out through the door. Then she shut the door and bolted it from inside. Mir sahib saw the chessmen being thrown out and heard the sound of bangles, and the door being bolted. Realizing that the begum was inflamed he slunk away.

Mirza sahib said to his begum, 'You've been terrible.'

The begum retorted, 'If Mir sahib comes here, I shall drive him away from the doorsteps. Had he devoted himself to God like this he would have become a saint. You keep playing chess and I remain enslaved to the domestic chores. Are you going to the hakim, or are you still unwilling?'

Mirza came out, but instead of going to the hakim he went straight to Mir sahib's and narrated the whole story.

Mir sahib replied, 'When I saw the chessmen being thrown out, I understood everything and ran. She seems so hot-tempered! But you have pampered her so much. This is not good. Why should she bother what you do outside? It is her duty to manage the household. Why should she worry about what you do?'

'Never mind,' said Mirza, 'Where shall we play now?'

'Why worry? This is a big house. We can play anywhere here.'

'But how shall I make the begum accept this? When I sat at home she kept on creating trouble. Now if I sit here she won't let me breathe.'



But the begum was in no mood to listen. She walked up to the dewan khana, but she stopped. She would not go in, in the presence of an outsider. She looked in but there was no one there. Mir sahib had displaced a few pieces on the board and had gone out for a stroll to show his innocence. The begum went inside and overturned the chessboard, threw some chessmen under the dewan and a few others out through the door. Then she shut the door and bolted it from inside. Mir sahib saw the chessmen being thrown out and heard the sound of the bangles, and the door being bolted. Realizing that the begum was inflamed he slunk away.

Now, this becomes a loaded scene. And I stop here at this point today, and obviously I will come back to it next lecture as well. But suffice it to say this becomes an act of subversion because we see this hesitation on the part of the begum sahib to enter the dewan khana which is a male space, which is a liminal almost public space where women are forbidden to enter and access. So, she is hesitating she is a bit reluctant to go in at the first place.

But then she does not see a stranger because we are told that Mir being a cowardly man and facing defeat, he had manoeuvred some chess pieces on the board and in order to

show his innocence he had gone out for a stroll, just to prove the fact that he had not done anything, he had not tempered on the chessboard but having gone out he left the room open and, free for the woman to come in.

So, begum sahiba seeing that there is no men in dewan khana, crosses the Rubicon as it were, enters his space and then she dismantles the chessboard, and she flings out the chess men on the floor. And this becomes an act of subversion, a big act of subversion the only subversion available to her, right.

And now, Mir sees it from the outside and then seeing that the begum was inflamed, he slunk away. And this is very obviously a very interesting verb. There is a reptilian quality about slinking away, it is like a spineless movement, a slinking away, right. So, that becomes interesting as well. He slunk away.

So, this slinking away like I said becomes important and we are told that you know he obviously is a cowardly man. So, the entire scene over here becomes some kind of a gender subversion. Although, it hardly matters at any level because all the woman can do is dismantle the chessboard and that is the only agency available to her and that too becomes a rebellious act which is frowned upon, which is you know obviously admonished by all the men and we are told later that Mir would come back and admonish Mirza for not taming his wife sufficiently, etcetera.

So, this is obviously a very sad commentary on the gender inequality of Lucknow at that point of time. It is very feudal hierarchical Lucknow, a very decadent, very hierarchical, very self-absorbent absorbing narcissistic Lucknow which is gradually dying, the culture is gradually dying a natural death. So, that becomes obviously depicted and dramatized in this particular scene.

So, we stop at this point today. And we move on, and hopefully finish this story in the next couple lectures.

Thank you for your attention.