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**II M.A-ENGLISH-IV SEMESTER**

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**KABULIWALA**

Perhaps the most powerful element of “Kabuliwallah” is the way Tagore portrays the human connection as it transcends social class, time, age, and culture. In the beginning of the story, the unnamed narrator describes the close relationship he has with his five-year-old little daughter named [**Mini**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/kabuliwala/characters/mini). Mini is friendly and quickly makes friends with an Afghan Kabuliwallah (a peddler) named [**Rahamat**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/kabuliwala/characters/rahamat-the-kabuliwala). When Rahamat is sent to jail for stabbing a customer who refused to pay their debt, however, both Mini and the narrator forget about him and move on with their lives. Eight years later, Rahamat is released from jail and discovers that Mini has grown up and has forgotten him, which forces him to face the fact that his own daughter, [**Parvati**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/kabuliwala/characters/parvati), back in Afghanistan will have forgotten him, too. In “Kabuliwallah,” Tagore argues that real, meaningful connections can only be made when people recognize the common humanity in one another regardless of their differences.

Rahamat and the narrator could not be more different at first glance, and this initially prevents the narrator from believing he could have anything in common with Rahamat. In the opening scene of the story, the narrator is working on his novel, but it is unclear if this is his only form of work or even if he is successful at it. However, it becomes evident that the narrator is financially well-off because they can afford a gatekeeper and because Rahamat uses the respectful term “Babu” when talking to him. Rahamat, on the other hand, is “dressed in dirty baggy clothes” and, at best, speaks a “hybrid sort of Bengali.” Furthermore, Rahamat is forced to trek far away from his home and family in order to make a living, indicating that opportunities back home are limited and that he ahs not been able to earn enough abroad to be able to stay with his family permanently. While the narrator’s daughter, Mini, quickly develops a meaningful connection with Rahamat, the narrator has difficulty seeing him as anything but an inferior. This is shown by the narrator’s insistence on giving Rahamat money for the nuts he gave Mini as a gift—the narrator is unable to recognize that the two of them have developed a real connection despite differences in age, ethnicity, and social class.

The connection that the narrator and Rahamat eventually develop begins with their mutual connection with Mini, who brings them both a kind of happiness their present situations would typically prevent them from experiencing. The narrator says that Mini “can’t stop talking for a minute,” and while his [**wife**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/kabuliwala/characters/the-narrator-s-wife-mini-s-mother) loses patience with this and “scolds her,” he simply “can’t do that.” Unlike Mini’s mother, the narrator enjoys answering Mini’s questions and teaching her more about the world that he himself longs to explore. Rahamat, on the other hand, spends a large portion of his time away from his wife and young daughter, limiting his ability to be an active and present father. Mini, however, fills this void and gives Rahamat the kind of happiness denied him by the distance between himself and his daughter. To the narrator, Rahamat is little more than his daughter’s play-fellow. He says seeing them together gave him “pleasure,” but this evidently has more to do with the image they present to his mind (“a young child and a grown man laughing so heartily”) than with any personal liking for Rahamat himself.

Because the narrator initially sees Rahamat as an inferior, it is easy for him to forget about Rahamat after his arrest. Rahamat doesn’t truly become human to the narrator until many years later when he learns of the common ground they share: that they both have daughters that they love dearly. Mini is going to “darken her parents’ house” by leaving it to get married, which makes the narrator sentimental as he thinks about their former close connection. When Rahamat suddenly appears at the narrator’s house, the narrator initially only sees him as a “would-be murderer” and treats him coldly when he asks to see Mini. Once again, the narrator assigns mercenary motives to Rahamat’s interest in Mini, shown by the narrator’s attempt to give him money to leave. This changes when Rahamat shows the narrator his only “memento” of his daughter—a [**handprint**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/kabuliwala/symbols/parvati-s-handprint) on a piece of paper that he keeps tucked inside the breast pocket of his shirt. Only then does the narrator “forget” their differences and recognize all that they, as fathers, have in common, saying, “I understood then that he was as I am” and is able to connect to him on a human level. Although class pride and bias initially prevent the narrator from treating Rahamat with respect and equality, their common ground as fathers of well-loved daughters ultimately suggests that they’re not so different after all, allowing them to truly connect to one another on a human level.

Every year Rahamat carried this memento of his daughter in his breast-pocket when he came to sell raisins in Calcutta’s streets: as if the touch of that soft, small, childish hand brought solace to his huge, homesick breast. My eyes swam at the sight of it. I forgot then that he was an Afghan raisin-seller and I was a Bengali Babu. I understood then that he was as I am, that he was a father just as I am a father. The handprint of his little mountain-dwelling Parvati reminded me of my own Mini.

Mini left the room, and Rahamat, sighing deeply, sat down on the floor. He suddenly understood clearly that his own daughter would have grown up too since he last saw her, and with her too he would have to become re-acquainted: he would not find her exactly as she was before. Who knew what had happened to her these eight years?