

Chapter – 1 The Portrait Of A Lady

Khushwant Singh

Q1. Notice these expressions in the text Infer their meaning from the context. The thought was almost revolting An expanse of pure white serenity a turning-point accepted her seclusion with resignation a veritable bedlam of chirrupings frivolous rebukes the sagging skins Of the dilapidated

Answer. The thought was almost revolting — The thought that the author's grandmother was once young and pretty raises a doubt in the mind of the author. He finds it too hard to believe. an expanse Of pure White serenity — It refers b the calm peaceful and serene character and conduct of the authors grandmother. She is compared to the peaceful winter landscape in the mountains. a turning-point — It refers to the point where the author's relationship with his grandmother changes drastically after they move to the city-house. accepted her seclusion With resignation — This shows the author's grandmother passive submission to her secluded life after she gradually loses touch with her grandson. a veritable bedlam Of chirruping — It refers to the noise, confuse' and chaos caused by the chirruping of the sparrows that scattered and perched around the author's grandmother. frivolous rebukes — It refers the casual and light-hearted rebukes of the grandmother to the sparrows. the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum — It points to the shabby and deteriorated condition of the drum.

Understanding The Text

Q1. Mention the three phases of the author's relationship with his grandmother before he left the country to study abroad.

Answer. The three phases of the authors relationship with his grandmother before he left the country to study abroad are given below. The first phase was the period of the author's early childhood. During this phase, he used to live with his grandmother in the village. The grandmother used to take care of him from waking him up and getting him ready to accompanying him to the school. Both shared a good friendship with each other. The second phase was the time when the author and the grandmother moved to the city live with authors parents. This was a turning-point in their friendship because now they •saw less of each other. The third phase was the time the author joined Diversity He was given a room of his own and the common link of their friendship was snapped. The grandmother turns to wheel-spinning and reciting prayers all day long. She accepted her seclusion with silence.

Q2. Mention three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school.

Answer. The authors grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school because: (i) She could not help him with his in English, science. She didn't

believe in them (ii) No teaching of God and scriptures. (iii) She was unhappy with the idea of music lessons being given at school. She considered music suitable only for the people with be dignity.

Q3. Mention three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up.

Answer. The three ways in which the authors grandmother spent her days after he grew up are by spinning wheel, reciting prayers and feeding the sparrows.

Q4. Mention the odd way in which the author's grandmother behaved just before she died.

Answer. The grandmother told the family that her end was near, She had omitted to pray, she was not going to waste any more time talking to us. She lay peacefully in bed praying and telling her beads.

Q5. Mention the way in which the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author's grandmother died.

Answer. The sparrows and the grandmother developed an intimate relationship in this manner. When the grandmother died thousands of sparrows expressed their sorrow by sitting scattered in the verandah in mourning while grandmothers dead-body lay there. They did not chirrup. Authors mother threw some pieces of bread but they did not eat them. When they carried grandmother's corpse they flew away quietly Thus, the sparrows mourned her death and paid their silent tribute to the grand old lady in a very unique manner.

Talking About The Text

Q1. Talk to your partner about the following.

1. The author's grandmother was a religious person. What are the different ways in which we come to know this?

Answer. 1. The author's grandmother was a religious lady With a kind heart. Her one hand was always busy in telling the beads of her rosary Her lips constantly moved in an inaudible prayer. She used to get up early in the morning She did her morning prayer in "a monotonous sing-song". Everyday, she went along With the author to his school and While narrating studied she sat in a temple and read scriptures Later, in the City she was unhappy that there was no religious teaching at school. Before dying she stopped talking to her family members and turned to prayers, and counting the beads.

2. Describe the changing relationship between the author and his grandmother. Did their feelings for each other change?

Answer. 2. The changing circumstances did have a bearing on the relationship between the author and his grandmother, Author and his grandmother lived as intimate

friends in the village. A turning point came in their relationship when they came to the city to live with author's parents. The author joined an English school in the city. She remained confined to home as here she could not accompany him to the school. In the new English school, she could not help him in studies. She could not like the kind of education being given to the author at the English school. The grandmother became disturbed as there was no teaching about God and scriptures in the new school. She reconciled herself with spinning and taking to feed the sparrows. When the narrator grew up, he went up to university and then went abroad. The common link of friendship between the author and his grandmother was snapped. His grandmother accepted her seclusion with resignation. No, their feelings for each other did not change though distances grew between them.

3. Would you agree that the author's grandmother was a person strong in character? If yes, give instances that show this.

Answer. 3. Yes, the author's grandmother was a person strong in character. The instances to prove this are given below. The author's grandmother was a person strong in character. She was a picture of contentment. She had her own thoughts about the learning at school. She considered the teaching of scriptures to be more fruitful than science and music. In her phase of loneliness and seclusion, she took to wheel-spinning and feeding sparrows. She appeared composed and did not display any emotion when the author decided to go abroad for studies. Ignoring everyone who tried to stop her, she sang for several hours celebrating the homecoming of her grandson. During the last few hours of her life, ignoring the protests of her family members, she stopped talking to everyone and took reciting prayers and telling her beads.

4. Have you known someone like the author's grandmother? Do you feel the same sense of loss with regard to someone whom you have loved and lost?

Answer. 4. Yes, I knew someone like the author's grandmother. It was my own grandmother who passed away recently. The intense sense of loss is very heart-wrenching as I spent almost fifteen years of my life with her. OR No, I have never known someone the way the author knew his grandmother. Thus, I have never felt the sense of grief presented in the story.

Thinking About Language

Q1. Which language do you think the author and his grandmother used while talking to each other?

Answer. The author and his grandmother might have used their mother-tongue to converse with each other. As the author, Khushwant Singh, belongs to Punjab, the language used by them might be Punjabi.

Q2. Which language do you use to talk to elderly relatives in your family?

Answer. Your Mother Tongue (Could be English, Hindi, Telugu, Bhojpuri etc.)

Q3. How would you say 'a dilapidated drum' in your language?

Answer. Know your meaning in mother tongue (In Hindi it is 'phata-hua dholak'.)

Q4. Can you think of a song or a poem in your language that talks of homecoming?

Answer. Come back ! Back to the land of your birth. Meadows are still green Air as fresh as you left them. Come and see those gurgling brooks They will reflect your childhood. Come back Years that rolled by Will come to life once again.

Working With Words

QI. Notice the following uses of the word 'tell' in the text.

1. Her fingers were busy telling the beads of her rosary,
2. I would tell her English words and little things of Western science and learning.
3. At her age one could never tell.
4. She told us that her end was near.

Given below are four different senses of the word 'tell'. Match the meanings to the uses listed above.

1. make something known to someone in spoken or written words
2. count while reciting
3. be sure
4. give information to somebody

Answer. 1. Make something known to someone in spoken or written words: I would tell her English words and little things of western science and learning.

2. Count while reciting: Her fingers were busy telling the beads of her rosary.

3. Be sure: At her age, one could never tell.

4. Give information to somebody: She told us that her end was near.

QII. Notice the different senses of the word 'take'. 1. to take to something: to begin to do something as a habit 2. to take ill: to suddenly become ill Locate these phrases in the text and notice the way they are used.

Answer. The instances where these phrases have been used in the story are given below. 1. " she took to feeding sparrows in the courtyard of our city house" _ This phrase refers to the daily activity that the author's grandmother took up when they shifted to the city. 2. "The next morning she was taken ill.- This phrase refers to the author's grandmother's sudden illness.

QIII. The word 'hobble' means to walk with difficulty because the legs and feet are in bad condition. Tick the words in the box below that also refer to a manner of walking.

haggle	shuffle	stride	ride	waddle
wriggle	paddle	swagger	trudge	slog

Answer. The words that also refer to a manner of walking are: Shuffle Stride Waddle Paddle Swagger Trudge Slog

A Photograph

Q1. Infer the meaning of the following words from the context. Padding Transient Now lock up the dictionary to see if your inference right.

Answer. Paddling: To move a boat by means of paddles. Transient: Something that stays at a place for a short time-period.

Think It Out

Q1. What does the word ‘cardboard’ denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?

Answer. 'Cardboard refers to the photograph only. This word has been used because photograph it lost its color and also clarity of its images.

Q2. What has the camera captured?

Answer. The camera has captured some happy moments from the childhood of the poet's mother. It was a scene taken from a beach where she had gone with her cousins and her uncle for a sea holiday. The girls were paddling in the water.

Q3. What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?

Answer. The sea has not changed over the years. It is still the same. The sea symbolizes eternity.

Q4. The poet's mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?

Answer. This laugh indicates her remembering her past. She looked back to her childhood with nostalgia and remembered the innocent joys of her childhood days.

Q5. What is the meaning of the line “Both wry with the laboured ease of loss.”

Answer. The line refers to the sea holiday as remembered by her mother and the poet remembering her mother's laughing face. Both these now belong to the past. Her mother is no more now.

Q6. What does “this circumstance” refer to?

Answer. 'This circumstance' refers to the present situation of the poet wherein the poet is absorbed in the painful memory of her dead mother. Looking at the photograph and thinking of her mother's daughter, the poet also realises that it has been the same number of years since her mother died as her mother's age in the photograph.

Q7. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?

Answer. The first stanza refers to the childhood days of the poet's mother when she was twelve years old or so. The stanza depicts a photograph of her mother when she went for a beach holiday with her cousins and uncle.

The second stanza refers to the poet's childhood days when her mother had become an adult. It depicts her mother recalling her childhood days while looking at the old photograph of hers (mentioned in the first stanza).

In the last stanza, the poet's adult life is described in which her mother is not with her anymore. She has been dead for almost twelve years. The stanza depicts the poet's looking at the same photograph and recollecting her mother's laughter. The loss of her mother puts her in utter grief. She has no words to describe the terrible pain of her mother's death.