



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2024-25)  
CLASS – XI  
QUESTION BANK ON THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

**CENTRAL IDEA OF THE STORY-**

The Portrait of a Lady describes a special bond between grandmother and grandson. Khushwant Singh narrates how the relationship develops over the years, and changes as the grandson grows up and the grandmother grows older. Solitude and silence fill the grandmother's days as she distances herself from the real world. She now prefers the company of the gods and the birds. She enters a world of her own and is content with herself.

**SUMMARY:** The Portrait of a Lady deals with an account of the author's old grandmother. She was very old and wrinkled. She was fat, short and bent. She moved about the house with her rosary in her hand. She was always dressed in white. Her hair was white. Her lips always moved in prayer. She would wake up the author and prepare him for school. She went with him to school. The school was attached to the temple. While children learnt alphabet, she sat inside and read religious books. After school they came back together. She gave bread to village dogs. After sometime they went to the city. The author was now in an English school. The grandmother could not help him with his lessons. She was not contented with what he learnt there. The writer told her that he was taught music. The grandmother did not like it. For her, music was meant for prostitutes. She was unhappy because there was no religious teaching at that school. There were no stray dogs. She took to feeding sparrows. The author then left for England for further studies. She did not feel upset. She went to the station to see him off. At the time of parting, she kissed the author. When he returned after five years, she came to the railway station to receive him. She did not look even a day older. Even now she was saying her prayer. In the evening, she did not pray. She brought a drum. She called women from her neighbourhood. She sang songs to celebrate the return of her grandson. The next morning, she fell ill. She lay peacefully in her bed praying. She died peacefully. Her death affected even the sparrows. They did not chirp. They ignored the crumbs thrown to them.

**ABOUT THE STORY-**

In this story, the author draws a pen portrait of his grandmother. He beautifully unfolds his relationship with her, while describing her appearance and daily activities.

**Appearance of the grandmother:** The author recalls his grandmother as a very old lady with a wrinkled face. She appeared so old that it was hard for him to believe that she had once been "young and pretty". She was short, fat and a little stooped in appearance. The author remembers her moving about the house in "spotless white", counting the beads of her rosary while her lips moved constantly in silent prayers. She was not "pretty" in the traditional sense, yet her serenity made her "beautiful".

**Initial years of togetherness:** Life in the village: In the initial years of his life, the author lived with his grandmother in the village, sharing a good friendship. His grandmother used to wake him up in the morning and get him ready for the school. She would hand over to him the things he required in the school. After having thick, stale chapattis with butter and sugar for breakfast, they used to leave for school. The author's grandmother always accompanied

him to school as it was attached to the temple. It was her habit to carry several stale chapattis for the village dogs, which they used to feed while returning from the school. The grandmother used to sit inside the temple reading holy books while the narrator learnt alphabets and prayers in the school.

**Turning point of their friendship:** Life in the city: The „turning-point“ of their friendship came when they moved to the city to stay with the author’s parents. Though they shared the same room, his grandmother no longer accompanied him to the school since the author started going in a bus. As years rolled by, they “saw less of each other”. Meanwhile, as there were no dogs in the streets, she took to feeding the sparrows. Unlike the village school, the author was not taught about God and the scriptures based on religion which troubled his grandmother. She did not believe in what was being taught at his school and was unhappy as she could not help him with his lessons. Moreover, she was disturbed at the idea of music lessons being given at school as she considered music to be unsuitable for gentlefolk. Her disapproval was conspicuous in her silence.

**The grandmother combat's her loneliness by feeding the sparrows:** When the author started going to the university, he was given a room of his own. It resulted in a further gap between them. She accepted her loneliness and rarely spoke to anyone. All day long, she sat spinning the wheel and reciting her prayers. She relaxed for a short time, only in the afternoon, to feed the sparrows who came in large numbers. The bond and level of comfort they shared with her is evident in the fact that they perched even on her legs and head. She used to be at her happiest-self while feeding the sparrows.

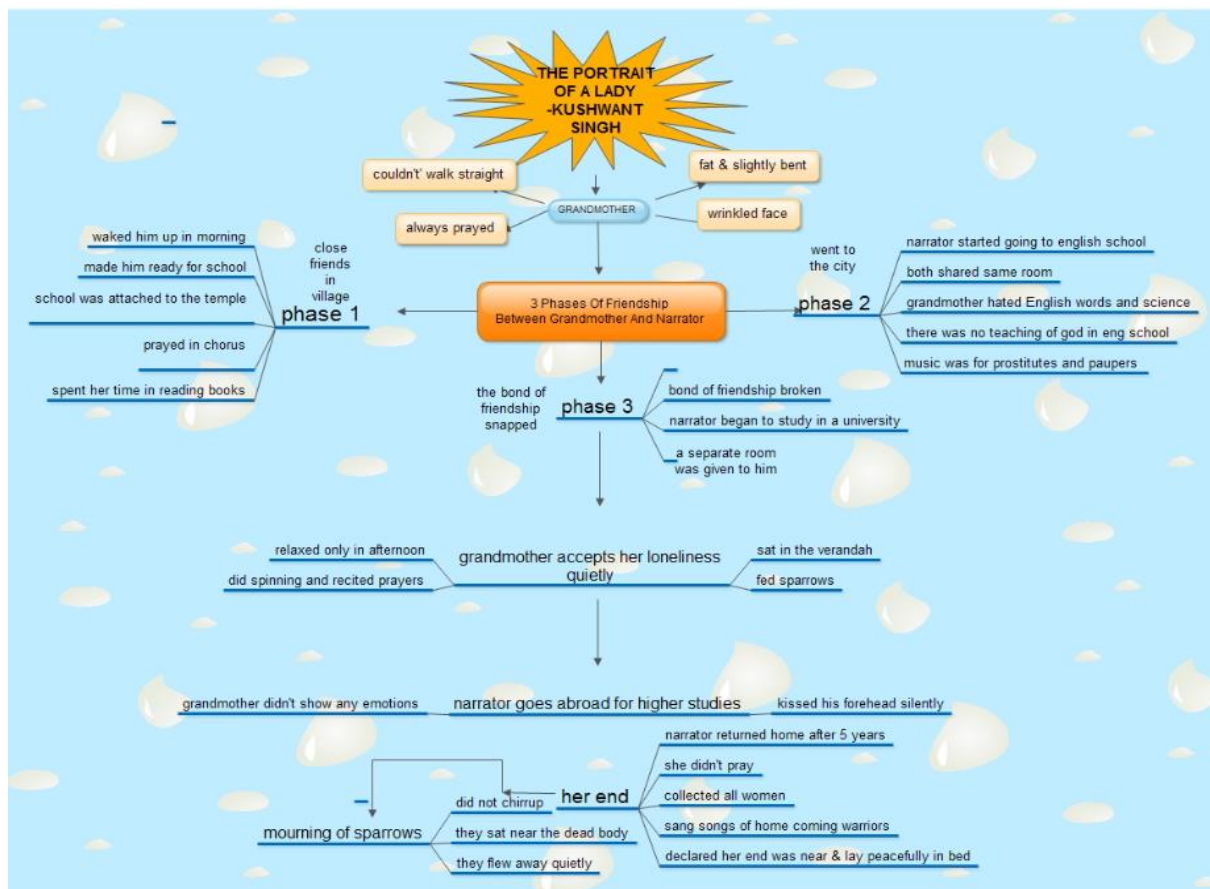
**Author leaves for higher studies:** The author decided to go abroad for further studies. He was sure that his grandmother would be upset at his departure. On the contrary, she came to the railway station to see him off but did not show any emotion. She was absorbed in her prayers, telling the beads of her rosary. She silently kissed the author's forehead, which the author considered to be (supposedly) the last sign of their physical contact.

**Author’s homecoming:** On his return after five years, the author did not find any change in his grandmother. She was as old as ever and remained absorbed in her prayers. Even that day, the happiest moment for her was feeding the sparrows. In the evening, for the first time ever, she did not pray. She collected several ladies of the neighbourhood and sang songs related to the home-coming of the warriors. She had to be persuaded to stop singing in order to avoid overstraining. However, the next day she was taken ill.

**Grandmother's death:** Though diagnosed with a mild fever by the doctor, grandmother knew that her end was near. She decided to spend the last few hours of her life reciting prayers and telling her beads. Soon, her lips stopped moving and she died.

**A silent tribute by the sparrows:** The family went to make arrangements for the grandmother’s funeral. As they came with a stretcher, they stopped mid-way to find thousands of sparrows scattered around her dead body. The sparrows mourned the death of the grandmother in utter silence. They ignored the bread crumbs thrown at them by the author’s mother and flew away silently after the body was carried away for cremation. The bread-crumbs were swept away by the sweeper next morning.

## MIND MAP



## MEANINGS OF THE PHRASES AND EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE STORY

- 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 to the calm, peaceful and serene character and conduct of the author's 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's passive submission to her secluded life after she gradually loses touch with her grandson.
- the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum – It points to the shabby and deteriorated condition of the drum.
- a veritable bedlam of chirruping – It refers to the noise, confusion and chaos caused by the chirruping of the sparrows that scattered and perched around the author's grandmother.
- frivolous rebukes – It refers to the casual and light-hearted rebukes of the grandmother to the sparrows.

## **TEXTUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

**Question 1: 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 author's 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 to live with author's 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 University. 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 accepts her seclusion with silence.

**Question 2: Mention three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school.**

ANSWER: The author's grandmother was unhappy after knowing that the things taught to him at school were related to western science and learning. Secondly, she did not believe such things that were taught at his new school. She was disturbed that there was no teaching about God and scriptures. Thirdly, she was unhappy with the idea of music lessons being given at school. She considered music suitable only for the people with low dignity. The disapproval of the grandmother was visible in her silence.

**Question 3: Mention three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up.**

ANSWER: The author's grandmother "accepted her seclusion with resignation". She spent her days of loneliness by engaging herself in the wheel-spinning activity, reciting prayers and feeding the sparrows.

**Question 4: Mention the odd way in which the author's grandmother behaved just before she died.**

ANSWER: She had omitted to pray; she was not going to waste any more time talking to them. She lay peacefully in bed praying and telling her beads. Even before they could suspect, her lips stopped moving and the rosary fell from her lifeless fingers.

**Question 5: Mention the way in which the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author's grandmother died.**

ANSWER: The author's grandmother shared a unique bond with the sparrows. She seemed at her happiest self while feeding the sparrows. The day the author's grandmother died, thousands of sparrows sat scattered around her dead body. They sat there in utter silence mourning the death of the grandmother. They took no notice of the bread crumbs thrown at them and flew away silently after the body was carried for the final rites. Next morning, the bread crumbs were swept away into the dustbin by the sweeper

## **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS**

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

ANSWER: The author's grandmother was a religious lady with a kind heart. She moved about in the house "telling the beads of her rosary". Her lips constantly moved in "inaudible prayer". She said her morning prayers in monotonous sing-song hoping that the author would learn it by heart. Every day, she went along with the author to his school and sat in the temple that was attached to it, reading the holy books for hours. She believed in the teachings about God and scriptures and did not like that her grandson was not taught about them in the city school. Gradually, she turned to reciting prayers throughout the day. Before dying, she stopped talking to her family members and turned to prayers, and counting the beads.

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

ANSWER: The story describes the entire phase of relationship shared by the author and his grandmother. In his early childhood, the author shared a strong bond with his grandmother. However, that tie of friendship loosened a little when they both shifted to his parents' city house. She no longer accompanied him to the school and could not help him with his lessons. There was a further crack in the relationship when the author joined university as he was given a private room and the common link between them was snapped. They were further distanced from each other when the author went abroad for five years. In spite of changes in the course of the relationship (due to the demands of the situation), their feelings for each other remained unchanged. Though she did not display her emotions, when the author was leaving for abroad, she wholeheartedly celebrated his homecoming when he returned.

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

ANSWER: 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 to reciting prayers and telling her beads.

## Assertion and Reason Based

**Q1: Assertion: The writer's grandmother was not very pretty.**

**Reason: The writer compared her calm face with the winter landscape.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) Both assertion and reason are false.

**Ans:** (b)

Both the assertion and reason are true. The writer describes his grandmother as not very pretty but constantly beautiful. However, the reason provided, the comparison to the winter landscape, does not directly explain why she was not very pretty. It's a subjective evaluation by the writer, and the reason doesn't clarify it.

**Q2: Assertion: The writer's grandmother felt upset about the subjects he studied in the city.**

**Reason: She wanted the writer to focus on music lessons.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) Both assertion and reason are false.

**Ans:** (a) Both assertion and reason are false.

Both the assertion and reason are true. The text mentions that the grandmother was upset that the city school didn't teach about God and scriptures and that the writer was given music lessons. The reason directly explains her upset feelings.

**Q3: Assertion: The writer's grandmother could foresee her impending death.**

**Reason: She prayed and recited beads on her deathbed.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) Both assertion and reason are false.

**Ans:** (a)

Both the assertion and reason are true. The text indicates that the grandmother could foresee her death, as she prayed and told beads on her deathbed. The reason provided directly supports this assertion.

**Q4: Assertion: The sparrows sat dispersed around the grandmother's body.**

**Reason: The sparrows made noise when the grandmother's body was carried away.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.

**(c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.**

**(d) Both assertion and reason are false.**

**Ans:** (b)

Both the assertion and reason are true. The text mentions that sparrows sat dispersed around the grandmother's body. However, the reason does not directly explain why they sat dispersed. The reason suggests that the sparrows made noise when her body was carried away, which isn't explicitly stated in the text.

**Q5: Assertion: The writer's relationship with his grandmother was broken when he went to the university.**

**Reason: The writer got a separate room in his house for his university studies.**

**(a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.**

**(b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.**

**(c) Assertion is true, but the reason is false.**

**(d) Both assertion and reason are false.**

**Ans:** (a)

Both the assertion and reason are true. The text indicates that the common link between the writer and his grandmother was broken when he went to the university. The reason provided directly explains why this link was broken, as the writer got a separate room for his university studies, which likely led to reduced interaction with his grandmother.

### **EXTRACT BASED QUESTIONS:**

**Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow by choosing from the given alternatives.**

*I would tell her English words and little things of western science and learning, the law of gravity, Archimedes' Principle, the world being round, etc. This made her unhappy. She could not help me with my lessons. She did not believe in the things they taught at the English school and was distressed that there was no teaching about God and the scriptures.*

i. Why grandmother of author could not help author with his lessons?

a. She did not want to.

**b. She did not know the subjects.**

c. Author did not want her to help him

d. Author did not talk to her. ii.

ii. According to the extract, which of the following were not told by the author to his grandmother

1. English Words

2. French Words

- 3. Law of gravity
- 4. World being flat
- 5. Energy conservation principles

**a. 2,4 and 5**

b. 1,3 and 6

c. 2,5 and 6

d. 1,4 and 6

iii. Grandmother was unhappy with school because of

a. No teaching about God

b. No teaching about scriptures

**c. Both a and b**

d. None of the above

iv. According to the extract, what was the medium of instructions in the school?

a. Hindi

b. Tamil

**c. English**

d. Malayalam

v. Which word in the extract is synonym of 'coached'?

a. Learning

b. Distressed

c. Believe

**d. Taught**

**Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow by choosing from the given alternatives.**

*All over the verandah and in her room right up to where she lay dead and stiff wrapped in the red shroud, thousands of sparrows sat scattered on the floor. There was no chirruping. We felt sorry for the birds and my mother fetched some bread for them. She broke it into little crumbs, the way my grandmother used to, and threw it to them. The sparrows took no notice of the bread.*

i. Why birds were not chirruping?

a. They were dumb

b. Author had ordered them

c. There was no sound in the room

**d. They had understood the grandmother was dead.**

ii. What was the colour of the cloth with which grandmother was covered?

a. Green

b. Yellow

**c. Red**



d. Purple

iii. In your opinion, why did author's mother bring some bread?

**a. She thought birds had come to eat.**

b. She had some extra bread in the house.

c. She wanted to pay homage to grandmother.

d. She had done it without any thinking.

iv. Which word in the extract is synonym of 'spread'?

a. Threw

**b. Scattered**

c. Wrapped

d. Fetched

v. Which of the following rightly explains the phrase 'took no notice of' used in the extract?

a. Did not write notice

b. Did not give any direction

**c. Did not pay any attention.**

d. Did not worry.

**ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN 30-40 WORDS.**

**1. What stories of grandmother did the author treat as fables of the prophets? Why?**

Ans: The author treated the stories of grandmother's youth and beauty as fables as he had always seen her old and he found it hard to accept that she could once be pretty and young.

**2. What is the significance of sparrows in grandmother's life?**

Ans: When grandmother shifted to the city, she spent half an hour every day feeding the sparrows. The birds became friendly with her and came every day in the verandah of her house. It was the happiest hour of the day. When she died after short illness, thousands of sparrows flew in the verandah and sat near her body. They were quiet and not chirping. They even ignored the bread crumbs given by author's mother. In this way they expressed their bonding with the grandmother.

**3. Grandmother never complained about anything. Her patience was beyond any measure. Mention any two instances.**

Ans: Two instances that show the grandmother's patience are:

i) when she fed the sparrows, the birds sat on her head but she never shooed them away

ii) she did not become upset when the author went abroad for higher education. She accepted the decision in a calm and composed manner.

**4. "That was a turning point in our friendship." What was that turning point?**

Ans: The turning point in their friendship came when the author's parents called the author and his grandmother to the city. They shared one room but grandmother could not come with him to the school nor could she assist him in his studies.

**5. Everybody including the sparrows mourned the grandmother's death. Elaborate.**

Ans: When the grandmother died, thousands of sparrows collected and sat in the courtyard. There was no chirruping. When the author's mother threw some breadcrumbs for them, they took no notice of the breadcrumbs. They were full of grief at her death and flew away quietly after the cremation.

**ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN 100-120 WORDS.**

**1. Draw a character sketch of Khushwant Singh's grandmother as portrayed by him in the lesson 'The Portrait of a Lady'.**

Ans: The narrator's grandmother was a true picture of love, affection and care. She had all those virtues which grandmother's generally have for their grandsons. She was highly religious but a conservative lady. The grandmother presented a picture of peace and contentment. Her spotless white dress and her silver white hair gave her spiritual beauty. The grandmother was not physically very attractive. She had deep love and affection for her grandson. She got him ready for the school and came back home with him. She was a very religious lady. She was always telling the beads of her rosary. She had compassion even for animals and birds. She fed the village dogs. She took to feeding the sparrows in the city. But the grandmother was a conservative lady. She didn't like the English language and Science. She hated music. She associated music with prostitutes and beggars.

**2. The grandmother herself was not formally educated but was serious about the author's education. How does the text support this?**

Ans: The grandmother was not formally educated but was serious about the author's education. She could read the scriptures. She realized the value of education and did not let the author miss school. She woke him up each morning, bathed him, dressed him, plastered his wooden slate, gave him breakfast and walked him to school where he was taught the alphabet and morning prayers. While he sat in the veranda learning, the grandmother read her scriptures. In the city, she could not accompany him to school as he went by the school bus. He was now in an English school, where they taught science. She could not understand English and did not believe in science. The fact that they were not taught about God made her unhappy. Khushwant Singh's music lessons in school upset her over its lewd associations. She took an interest in the author's education.

**VALUE BASED QUESTIONS**

**1. Aged people should not be left behind and every effort should be made that they live with their children and grandchildren. This will inculcate a proper understanding between the old and the new generation. Write your views.**

Ans. The aged people feel the need for physical, Moral, financial and emotional support from their children. they are left alone by their children quite often to lead a lonely life. Even their virtues become major vices. When the aged are left alone, a fathomless gap appears between them and their children. the temporary separation which may be the outcome of circumstances is good as it enhances love and respect. The elderly live in their own world and it is difficult to change their lifestyle. They want nothing from the new generation except love and respect. It is true that our new generation has its priorities but they must not become indifferent to the needs of the aged. When the aged live with their children, there comes a

change in their outlook. Being experienced they try to adapt themselves to the new environment. A solution of old age problems lies not in building old age homes but giving them a little care, affection and love. We must remember that we, too, will be like them one day. A thorough change of attitude is needed. The new generation can enrich itself by listening to the experiences of the elderly and they, in turn, can learn a lot about modern gadgets and things from the young. This will help in bridging the generation gap and give away to a healthy and happy society.