



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2022-23)

QUESTION BANK - THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Class: XI

Sub: ENGLISH

Introduction

The Portrait of a Lady is an autobiography by Khushwant Singh. It is a perception of Khushwant Singh's grandmother. The author has drawn a portrait of his grandmother with words and tried to unfold the beautiful relationship with her while telling the readers about his grandmother's appearance and daily activities.

I. SUMMARY

The writer recalls his Grandmother as short, healthy and slightly bent. Her hairs were silver in colour and were scattered messily on her wrinkled face. She used to walk around the whole house in white clothes. She kept her one hand resting on her waist and the other hand was telling the beads of her rosary.

The writer thinks of her as not very pretty but constantly beautiful all the time. He compares her calm face with the winter landscape. During their lengthy stay in the village, Grandmother woke him up from the bed in the early morning, plastered his wooden slate, organized his breakfast, and sent him to the school. The temple was connected to the school. She sat inside and studied the sacred texts while the children learned the alphabet.

On their way back to the home she used to give the stale chapattis to the street dogs. A turning point in their beautiful relationship arrived when they went to live in a city. Despite the fact that they shared a room, their relationship started to grow apart. Now, the writer used to go to the city school on a school bus and studied subjects like English, Physics, mathematics and many more subjects that his grandmother could not understand at all.

His grandmother could no longer go to school with him to send him. She felt upset that there was no teaching about God and scriptures at the city school. Instead, he was given music lessons, but she said nothing. She thought music was dreadful. It was just good for prostitutes and beggars, according to her. It was not intended for gentlemen.

When the writer went to a university, he got a separate room in his house. The common link of the relationship between the grandson and the grandmother was broken now. Grandmother rarely talked to anyone in the house now. The writer's grandmother quietly accepted her loneliness. She was constantly occupied with her spinning wheel and reciting prayers and she hardly ever spoke to anyone. She took a break in the afternoon. Her daily routine consisted of breaking bread into pieces and giving it to the birds. The birds would perch on her legs, head, and even her shoulders.

When the writer was leaving on a trip abroad for his further studies, his grandmother did not get disturbed at all. Rather she went to the train station to say goodbye, but she didn't say anything and merely kissed his forehead. Her lips were moving in prayer, her thoughts were consumed by prayer and her fingers were busy telling the beads on her rosary. Seeing her grandmother at this old age, the writer was thinking that it might be his last meeting with his grandmother. But when he came back home after a duration of 5 years, his grandmother was there to welcome him back and he saw her celebrate his return.

The next morning after the return of his grandson she got ill. Although the doctor told them that it was a slight fever and would go away very soon, still she could foresee that her time to leave this world was near. She did not want to waste her time talking to someone. Her fingers were busy telling the beads on her rosary.

She went to her bed praying and telling the beads till her lips stopped moving and the rosary fell down from her lifeless hand. Her body was discovered on the floor, wrapped in a red shawl after she died. To grieve her death, thousands of sparrows flew in and sat dispersed around her body. All the sparrows flew away without making any noise when the dead body of the old lady was carried away for the last rites.

To sum up, in the portrait of a lady summary, the writer and his grandmother had a beautiful bond between them and loved each other a lot. The story tells us how beautiful a relationship was shared by the grandson and his grandmother despite the changes.

Theme

The theme can be interpreted as spanning many stages of the author's life. During childhood, the key themes were seen to be innocence, admiration, and love between a grandmother and her grandson. During the author's stay in the city, however, the two were linked by themes of separation and unfamiliarity. Finally, following his return from abroad, the dominant subject appears to be a sense of reunion as well as a bittersweet ending.

II.TEXTUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Mention

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

Ans: The three phases of the author's relationship with his grandmother before he left the country to study abroad were:

(a) Admiration and friendship – The author admired his grandmother and described her as the “winter landscape in the mountains, an expanse of pure white serenity breathing peace and contentment”. They were good friends. She woke him up in the morning and got him ready for school. She waited for him while he was in the village school and then walked him back.

(b) Growing distant – She could not accompany him to the city 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 learning music in school made her unhappier as she felt it was not meant for gentle folk.

(c) Wide gulf – When he went to the university, he got a separate room and even the last link of a shared room was snapped. The grandmother kept to her spinning wheel, rarely talking to anyone.

2. Three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school.

Ans: The three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school were: She could not understand English and did not believe in science that was taught at the English school. She was distressed that they were not taught about God and the scriptures. She was very disturbed about the fact that he was being given music lessons as she felt, music was not the way of the gentle folk.

3. Three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up.

Ans: The three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up were: She was resigned to her loneliness and did not interact much with the author. From sunrise to sunset she sat by her wheel, spinning and reciting prayers. In the afternoon, she relaxed for a while to feed the sparrows that brought her happiness.

4. The odd way in which the author's grandmother behaved just before she died.

Ans: Unlike the doctor who believed that she would recover, the grandmother knew that her end was near. She said, since only a few hours before the close of the last chapter of her life she had omitted to pray, she was not going to waste any more time talking to them. She ignored their protests. She lay peacefully in bed praying and began telling her beads till her lips stopped moving and the rosary fell from her lifeless fingers.

5. The way in which the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author's grandmother died.

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 bread for them, they took no notice of the bread. They were full of grief at her death and flew away quietly after the cremation. The breadcrumbs had to be swept away the next day.

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

Ans: The author recalls his grandmother as a very religious person. In his earliest memories he recalls her hobbling about the house telling the beads of her rosary. As she bathed him she said her morning prayer, hoping that he, too, would learn it. While he studied in school, she read scriptures inside the temple.

Once the author went to the university, and he and his grandmother drifted apart, she rarely left her spinning wheel to talk to anyone. From sunrise to sunset she sat by her wheel, spinning and

reciting prayers. The author recalls that even during the last hours of her life she spent all her time praying.

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

Ans: When the author was a young boy, his parents shifted to the city leaving him with his grandmother. They were **good friends and spent all their time together**. She woke him up each morning, bathed him, dressed him, plastered his wooden slate, gave him breakfast and walked him to school. While he sat in the veranda learning, the grandmother sat inside the temple reading scriptures.

When they had both finished, they would walk back together. But once **in the city, there was a turning point in their friendship**. The only thing that remained unchanged was their common bedroom. She could not accompany him to school as he went by the school bus. He now went to 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. His learning music in school made her feel distressed.

When he went to the university, **he got a separate room and this snapped off their interaction** even further. This was not deliberate but the demands of the situation had this effect on their relationship. However, their feelings for each other never changed. When the writer was going abroad, she went to the railway station to see him off but did not speak a word, she only kissed his forehead. The writer cherished this as their **last physical contact** as he was going away for five years. But when he returned, she was still there and was delighted to see him back.

In the evening she, for whom music had lewd associations, collected women from the neighbourhood and beat the drum and sang for hours of the homecoming of the warriors. For the first time, she missed her prayers to celebrate the author's homecoming. The next day, she developed a mild fever and died; it was almost as if she had been waiting for the author's return.

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

Ans: Khushwant Singh's grandmother was a strong woman whom he loved and admired. When his parents went to the city, she took charge of him. In the city, although she disapproved of certain things that he was taught in school, she did not express it.

She had the inner strength to withdraw quietly. The writer also recalls, with pleasure, the moments when he was going abroad; she went to the railway station to see him off but did not talk or show any emotion.

Her lips moved in prayer and she kissed his forehead silently. The strength of her character was also evident during the last few hours of her life. She knew that her end was near. She said that she was not going to waste any more time talking to anybody.

She ignored their protests and lay peacefully in bed praying and telling her beads till the last moment. A peaceful pallor spread on her face and they knew that she was dead.

EXTRA QUESTIONS

III. Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow.

1. *People said that she had once been young and pretty and had even had a husband, but that was hard to believe. My grandfather's portrait hung above the mantelpiece in the drawing room. He wore a big turban and loose-fitting clothes. His long, white beard covered the best part of his*

chest and he looked at least a hundred years old. He did not look the sort of person who would have a wife or children. He looked as if he could only have lots and lots of grandchildren.

(a) Describe the author's grandfather's portrait?

(b) Why did grandfather look as if he could only have grandchildren ?

(c) Where was the portrait of the author's grandfather hanging ?

Answers :

(a) Author's grandfather in the portrait wore a big turban and loose-fitting clothes. He had a long white beard covering most of his chest.

(b) Grandfather of the author had a long, white beard that covered the best part of his chest. He looked at least a hundred years old. He seemed fit only to be a grandfather.

(c) The grandfather's portrait was hanging above the mantelpiece in the drawing room.

2. She hobbled about the house in spotless white with one hand resting on her waist to balance her stoop and the other telling the beads of her rosary. Her silver locks were scattered untidily over her pale, puckered face, and her lips constantly moved in inaudible prayer. Yes, she was beautiful. She was like the winter landscape in the mountains, an expanse of pure white serenity breathing peace and contentment.

a) What does the narrator mean by 'Silver locks'?

i) Lock and Key

ii) Grey Hair

iii) Attire of Silver colour

iv) None of these

b) Which figure of speech has been used in 'Pale puckered face'?

i) Simile

ii) Metaphor

iii) Alliteration

iv) Personification

d) What does the word 'Hobble' mean?

i) Walk quickly

ii) Limp

iii) Rush

iv) Hasten

IV. Short answer type questions-

1. Comment on the title 'The Portrait of a Lady'?

Ans. The author, describes his grandmother, painting a word-portrait for the reader. To him, with her pious, kind, understanding and caring persona, she is the true embodiment of the term, 'lady'. According to the author, the grandmother may not have been pretty, but her inner beauty shone through her persona making her beautiful.

2. Comment on the village school and the city school.

Ans. The village school was attached to a temple and the grandmother-grandson duo would walk to reach it. The teacher was a priest and prayers were taught along with the alphabet. Rote learning, wooden slates lathered with yellow chalk, ink pots and ink pens were used to facilitate learning. In the city school, the grandson travelled by a motor bus. The grandson learnt English, Science and Music. There was no teaching of God or the scriptures.

3. How spiritual was the narrator's grandmother?

Ans. Prayers/Grandmother's spirituality: The grandmother's spiritual nature and devotion to the Almighty defines her personality. She prays daily and almost constantly. She wishes to pass on the same devotion into her grandson. The only day she did not pray was the day her grandson returned from abroad and the very next morning, she fell ill. She prayed from then up to the point of her death passing away with the same spiritual calmness on her face that she had possessed when alive.

4. Why was it hard for the author to believe that his grandmother was once young and pretty?

Ans. The author had only seen and known his grandmother for twenty years as an old woman. She is short, fat and slightly stooped in stature, so, it was very difficult for him to believe the stories of his grandmother's beauty in her younger days.

6. Briefly describe the typical routine of the grandmother both in village and city.

Ans. During her village life, every day she would prepare the author for school. She dressed him up, gave him breakfast and would accompany his grandson to school because his school was attached to the temple. While the children learned alphabets and prayer the grandmother would read the scriptures at the temple. But after she came to the city, there wasn't much to do. So, she would sit and do some clothing work in her spinning wheel and at the afternoon she would feed the sparrows.

7. The grandmother had a divine beauty. How does the author bring this out?

Ans. The author brings out the inner beauty of the grandmother by comparing her to a snow-covered winter mountain landscape. The grandmother's silvery locks scattered untidily over her pale and wrinkled face. This made her look like an expanse of pure white serenity. She had a divine beauty. She looked like the winter landscape in the mountains. In her spotless white dress and grey hair, she was a picture of serenity, peace, sobriety and beauty.

10.Explain: "As for my grandmother being young and pretty, the thought was almost revolting".

Ans. The narrator's grandmother was terribly old. She could not appear young and beautiful. Her face was a crisscross of wrinkles. She was short, fat and slightly bent. The very idea of her being young and pretty did not appeal to the mind and was revolting.

V. Long answer type questions-

1. What does Khushwant Singh describe in 'The Portrait of a Lady'?

Ans. In "the portrait of a lady" Khushwant Singh basically tells about his relationship with his grandmother in three different phases of his life. In the first phase, he and his granny live in the village. Their relationship is great. She helps him with his work, drops and picks him from school, dressed him up. Then in the second phase they go to live in the city. Grandmother has problems with the English medium school in which he now studies. She can't help him with his study; they don't get to spend time together. She finds objection in the narrator's music lessons. She thinks music is a subject of lowly people. It's not for gentle people. So, it upsets her. In the third phase the author grows up.

He attends university. Their friendship kind of ends and they couldn't find time for each other. So, grandmother starts developing and confining herself in her own world. When

the author comes back from college, she behaves strangely by not praying and celebrates his home coming. Eventually, the loud singing makes her ill and then she dies. In “The Portrait of a Lady” author tries to show the change in relationship of the grandmother in the narrator’s life and the love that remains constant.

2. A grandmother is portrayed as a kind woman. What details in the portrait give that impression ?

Ans: In “The Portrait of a Lady”, the author, Khushwant Singh, portrays his grandmother as a kind, noble and very religious old woman. She was kind to his grandson and looked after him with a tender heart. She was kind and loving even to the birds and dogs she used to feed in the city and the village. The village dogs used to follow her to the i author’s school and also when she and the author came back home. This shows her deep attachment to the dogs.

In the city where there were no dogs, she started feeding the sparrows and little birds with crumbs of bread. The sparrows also loved her too much that some of them perched on I her legs, shoulders and even on her head. They were not at all scared of her. She too never shooed them away. Out of her deep love, she celebrated the home-coming of the author when he came back after studying abroad. She overstrained herself by beating the drum and singing the song N of the home-coming of the warriors. She fell ill and breathed her last while moving her lips r in prayer and telling the beads of her rosary.

Her kindness and love was also exhibited by the innumerable sparrows who came to mourn her death in perfect silence. They did not touch the broken little bits of bread thrown to them by the author’s mother. They too expressed their sorrow at the grandmother’s demise who had been loving and kind to them