

CHAPTER - 2

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

A. Understanding the Text

Question 1. 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:

- childhood – when he went to the village school and the grandmother helped him to get ready and went to school with him.
- boyhood – when he went to the city school in a bus. He shared a room with grandmother but she could no longer help him in his studies.
- early youth – when he went to the university and was given a room of his own. The common link of friendship was snapped.

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

Answer: The three reasons why the author's grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school are:

- She hated western Science and learning.
- She was pained to know that there was no teaching of God and the scriptures there.
- She was allergic to music. She thought it was not meant for decent people and gentlefolk. It was the monopoly of prostitutes and beggars.

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

Answer: The three ways in which the author's grandmother spent her days after he grew up are:

- She lived alone in her room as she had accepted her loneliness quietly.
- She sat at her spinning wheel reciting prayers.

- In the afternoon, she would feed the sparrows for half an hour.

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

Answer: Just before her death, the author's grandmother refused to talk to them. Since she had omitted to pray the previous night while she was singing songs of homecoming and beating the drum, she was not going to waste any more time. She ignored their protests. She lay peacefully in bed praying and telling beads.

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

Answer: Thousands of sparrows sat silently surrounding the dead body of the author's grandmother. There was no chirruping. The author's mother threw some crumbs of bread to them. They took no notice of them. As soon as the grandmother's corpse was carried off, they flew away quietly. Thus the sparrows expressed their sorrow.

B. Talking About the Text

Talk to your partner about the following:

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 deeply religious lady. We come to know this through the different ways of her behaviour. She visited the temple every morning and read scriptures. At home she always mumbled inaudible prayer and kept telling the beads of rosary. She would repeat prayers in a sing-song manner while getting the writer ready for school. She hoped that he would learn it by heart. She didn't like English school as there was no teaching of God and scriptures.

Even while spinning at her spinning-wheel she would recite prayers. Perhaps it was only once that she forgot to say her prayers. It was on the evening prior to her death when she felt over excited while celebrating the arrival of her grandson with songs and beatings of drum. She continued praying and telling beads of her rosary till her last breath.

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

Answer: During his boyhood, the author was completely dependent on his grandmother. She was a part of his life. The turning point in their friendship came when they went to city. She could no longer accompany him to school as he went there by bus. They shared the same room but she could not help him in his studies. She would ask him what the teachers had taught. She did not believe in the things that were taught at school. She was distressed that there was no teaching about God and the scriptures. She felt offended that music was also being taught. She expressed her disapproval silently. After this she rarely talked to him. When he went to university, he was given a room of his own. The common link of friendship was snapped.

However their feelings for each other did not change. They still loved each other deeply. She went to see the author off at the railway station when he was going abroad for higher studies. She showed no emotion but kissed his forehead silently. The author valued this as perhaps the last sign of physical contact between them. When the author returned after five years, she received him at the station. She clasped him in her arms. In the evening she celebrated his homecoming by singing songs and beating an old drum.

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, I agree that the author's grandmother was a person strong in character. She was a strong woman with strong beliefs. Although she was not formally educated, she was serious

about the author's education. She could not adjust herself to the western way of life, Science and English education. She hated music and disapproved of its teaching in school. She was a deeply religious lady. Her lips were always moving in a silent prayer. She was always telling the beads of her rosary. She went to temple daily and read the scriptures. She was distressed to know that there was no teaching about God and holy books at Khushwant's new English school.

She was a kind lady. She used to feed dogs in the village. In the city she took to feeding sparrows. Although old in years and weak in body she had strength of mind. Just before her death, she refused to talk to the members of the family as she did not want to waste her time. She wanted to make up for the time last evening when she had not prayed to God. She lay peacefully in bed saying prayers and telling the beads of her rosary till she breathed her last.

Question 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: Yes, I have known my grandfather, who loved me deeply and looked after me. He had served in the army before he retired as a colonel 20 years ago. When I was a school-going kid, he was still active and smart. He was fond of walking, jogging and playing outdoor games. He inspired us to get up early in the morning. He believed that a healthy mind lives in a healthy body. He used to give us good physical exercises followed by milk and nourishing food and then asked us to study for a while before going to school. In the afternoon, he would enquire what we had been taught at the school. He would help us in our home task and supervise our reading, writing and doing sums. He was gentle but firm. He laid stress on good habits and character building. He passed away when I had gone abroad for higher studies. I miss him a lot. A sense of loss fills me whenever I see his portrait on the wall. But his cheerful looks remind me to take heart and fight the struggle of life.

C. Thinking About language

Talk to your partner about the following:

Question 1. Which language do you think the author and his grandmother used while talking to each other?

Answer: The author's grandmother was not much educated. So, I think the author and his grandmother used to talk in their mother tongue—in this case Panjabi.

Question 2. Which language do you use to talk to elderly relatives in your family?

Answer: My elderly relatives are well versed in English and Hindi. I feel at home greeting them in English but like to converse with them freely in Hindi.

Question 3. What is the expression used in your language for a 'dilapidated drum'?

Answer: The expression used in our language for a 'dilapidated drum' is 'phata-purana dho.

Question 4. Can you think of a song or poem in your language that talks of homecoming?

Answer: There are many folk songs and poems singing of the exploits of brave warriors. All these talk of their homecoming after winning a battle.

D. Working with Words

I. Notice the following uses of the word 'tell' in the essay:

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 meaning to the uses listed above.

- (a) make something known to someone in spoken or written words
- (b) count while reciting
- (c) be sure
- (d) give information to somebody.

Answer:

Phrases	Meaning
1. telling the beads	(b) count while reciting
2. tell her	(d) give information to somebody
3. one could never tell	(c) be sure
4. told us	(a) make something known to someone in spoken or written words

II. 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: suddenly become ill

Locate these phrases in the text and notice the way they are used.

Answer: In the text, these phrases are used as under:

- 1. to take to: She took to feeding sparrows in the courtyard of our city house.
- 2. take ill: The next morning she was taken ill.

III. 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.

<i>haggle</i>	<i>shuffle</i>	<i>stride</i>	<i>ride</i>	<i>waddle</i>
<i>wriggle</i>	<i>paddle</i>	<i>swagger</i>	<i>trudge</i>	<i>slog</i>

Answer: The words referring to a manner of walking are:

shuffle, stride, waddle, swagger, trudge, slog.

IV. Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context

➤ <i>the thought was almost revolting</i>	➤ <i>a veritable bedlam of chirrupings</i>
➤ <i>an expanse of pure white serenity</i>	➤ <i>frivolous rebukes</i>
➤ <i>a turning-point</i>	➤ <i>the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum</i>
➤ <i>accepted her seclusion with resignation</i>	

Answer:

- **the thought was almost revolting:** It was disgusting to think so.
- **an expanse of pure white serenity:** widespread clear and calm whiteness.
- **a turning point:** the time when an important change takes place. .
- **accepted her seclusion with resignation:** calmly submitted to her loneliness.
- **a veritable bedlam of chirruping's:** real confusing noise caused by chirping.
- **frivolous rebukes:** light rebukes
- **the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum:** the loose skin of an old drum.

E. Noticing Form

Notice the form of the verbs highlighted in these sentences:

- 1. My grandmother was an old woman. She had been old and wrinkled for the twenty years that I had known her. People said that she had once been young and pretty and had even had a husband, but that was hard to believe.
- 2. When we both had finished we would walk back together.
- 3. When I came back she would ask me what the teacher had taught me.
- 4. It was the first time since I had known her that she did not pray.

These are examples of the past perfect forms of verbs. When we recount things in the distant past we use this form.

Other examples for practice

Notice the form of verbs highlighted in these sentences:

Answer:

1. We understood the poem only when the teacher had explained it twice.
2. When the rain came, they had already reached their hotel.
3. We had worked together on that project for six months before she left me.
4. It was the first time since I had lived there that it began to snow.
5. The full moon was in the sky and had scattered its soft light all around.

F. Things to do

Talk with your family members about elderly people who you have been intimately connected with and are not there with you now. Write a short description of someone you liked a great deal.

Answer: My Grandmother

I lost my grandmother when I was twelve, but I still recollect her. She loved me affectionately and I liked her a great deal. She was quite old then, but she could move about with ease. I was her constant companion during her visits to temple, market, garden or to the houses of friends and relatives. Other members of the family would taunt me as granny's watch dog. She was my shield. I ran to her arms when my father or mother would get angry or thrash me. I miss the bedtime stories she used to tell me. Those highly fanciful stories were full of deeds of bravery or adventure and end on a note of success. They inspired me to do noble deeds in life. She was equally careful about my health and studies. She would make me drink milk and eat fruit to maintain a sound physique. She was good at drawing and helped me in writing alphabets. She also gave ready-made solutions to all my problems. She would bless me whenever I got success in any field—studies, sports, song, poetic recitation, poster making or fancy dress competition. Sometimes I miss her a lot.

MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

A. Short Answer Type Questions

Question 1. How long had the narrator known his grandmother—old and wrinkled? What did people say? How did the narrator react?

Answer: The narrator had known his grandmother—old and wrinkled for the last twenty years. She was terribly old. Perhaps she could not have looked older. People said that she had once been young and pretty. They said that she even had a husband. The narrator found it hard to believe.

Question 2. How did the narrator's grandfather appear in the portrait?

Answer: His grandfather looked very old. He had a long white beard. His clothes were loose fitting. He wore a big turban. He looked too old to have a wife or children. He looked at least a hundred years old. He could have only lots and lots of grandchildren.

Question 3. Which thought about the grandmother was often revolting and for whom?

Answer: The narrator's grandmother was very old and wrinkled. She had stayed at this stage for the last twenty years. People said that once she was young and pretty. The narrator couldn't even imagine her being young. So the thought was revolting to him.

Question 4. Explain: "As for my grandmother being young and pretty, the thought was almost revolting".

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

Question 5. The narrator's grandmother 'could never have been pretty, but she was always beautiful'. Explain the importance of the statement.

Answer: She was terribly old to appear pretty. Her face was a criss-cross of wrinkles. She was short, fat and slightly bent. She didn't create any physical appeal or attraction. However, in her spotless white dress and grey hair she was a picture of serenity, peace, sobriety and beauty.

Question 6. Why was it hard for the author to believe that his grandmother was once young and pretty ?

Answer: She was quite an old lady. She had been old and wrinkled for more than two decades. It is said that once she had been young and pretty. But it is hard to believe so.

Question 7. The narrator's grandmother looked like the 'winter landscape in the mountains'. Comment.

Answer: The grandmother was always dressed in spotless white. She had silvery hair. Her white locks spread untidily over her pale and wrinkled face. She looked like an expanse of pure white serenity. The stretch of snow over the mountains looks equally white and peaceful. So her silvery locks and white dress made her look like the winter landscape in the mountains.

Question 8. How did the narrator and his grandmother become good friends?

Answer: During his childhood, the narrator stayed with his grandmother in the village. She was his constant companion. She looked after him. She used to wake him up. She got him ready for school in the morning. She would give him breakfast. She went to school with him.

Question 9. Why could the grandmother not walk straight? How would she move about the house?

Answer: The grandmother was short and fat. She was also slightly bent. She put one hand on her waist to support the stoop. She could not walk straight. She walked like a lame person. She limped or hobbled about while moving.

Question 10. Describe how the grandmother spent her time while the narrator sat inside the village school.

Answer: The grandmother went to the school with the narrator. The school was attached to the temple. The narrator would learn alphabet and morning prayer at school. The grandmother would sit inside the temple. There she would read holy books. Thus she spent her time before they came back together.

Question 11. Grandmother has been portrayed as a very religious lady. What details in the story create this impression ?

Answer: She visited the temple every morning and read scriptures. At home she always mumbled inaudible prayer and kept telling the beads of rosary. She would repeat prayers in a sing-song manner while getting the narrator ready for school. All these details create the impression that she was a religious lady.

Question 12. The grandmother had a divine beauty. How does the author bring this out?

Answer: 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.

Question 13. What proofs do you find of the friendship between grandmother and grandson in this story ?

Answer: The grandmother was closely attached to the narrator in his childhood. She woke him, got him ready and took him to school. She prepared his wooden slate. She waited in the temple while he studied in school. They returned home together.

Question 14. The grandmother was a kind-hearted woman. Give examples in support of your answer.

Answer: Grandmother had a very kind heart. She loved her grandson. She loved even birds and animals. In the village, she fed the street dogs. In the city, she would feed the sparrows.

Question 15. "That was a turning point in our friendship." What was the turning point?

Answer: The turning point in their friendship came when they shifted to the city. Now the narrator went to an English school in a bus. Grandmother could no longer accompany him to school. Although they shared the same room, they saw less of each other.

Question 16. Draw a comparison between village school education and city school education.

Answer: Elementary education was given in village school. The pupils were taught alphabet and multiplication tables. It was quite simple—confined to the three R's—reading, writing and arithmetic. In the city school, English, Science and Music were taught. Unlike village school there was no teaching about God and scriptures.

Question 17. How did grandmother react to the narrator's receiving education in English school?

Answer: She did not believe in the things they taught at the English school. She hated Western Science and learning. She was pained to know that there was no teaching of God and the scriptures there.

Question 18. What led to the gradual distancing of the narrator from his grandmother in the city? Give three reasons.

Answer: As the years rolled by, the narrator grew older. His dependence on grandmother became lesser. He started going to an English school in a motor bus. She could not go with him. Moreover she couldn't help him in teaching English and Science. She hated English school. There was no teaching about God and scriptures there. All these things distanced the narrator from his grandmother.

Question 19. Why was the narrator's grandmother so much allergic to music? Why was the grandmother disturbed when she came to know that music lessons were being given at school?

Answer: She considered that music had low associations. It was not meant for decent people and gentlefolk. It was actually the monopoly of prostitutes and beggars.

Question 20. When was the common link of friendship between the narrator and his grandmother finally snapped?

Answer: The narrator went to the university. Now he was given a room of his own. This separated the narrator from his grandmother. The common link of their friendship was thus finally broken.

Question 21. How did the grandmother spend her time when the narrator went up to university?

Answer: She now lived alone in her room. She accepted her loneliness quietly. She was now

always busy with her spinning wheel. She sat at her spinning-wheel reciting prayers. She hardly talked to anyone. In the afternoon, she would feed the sparrows. This was her only pastime.

Question 22. Why did the grandmother take to feeding sparrows in the courtyard of their city house?

Answer: In the village, she used to throw 'chapattis' to the street dogs. But there were no dogs in the streets of the city. So, she took to feeding the sparrows in the courtyard of their city house.

Question 23. Describe in brief how grandmother spent half-an-hour with the sparrows. How did she feel then?

Answer: The grandmother usually fed the sparrows in the afternoon. She sat in the verandah. She broke bread into little bits. Hundreds of sparrows would gather there. They would chirrup noisily. Some perched on her legs and shoulders. Some sat even on her head. She enjoyed feeding them. She never pushed them away. It was her happiest half an hour.

Question 24. What was the happiest moment of the day for the grandmother?

Answer: The happiest half-hour of her day used to be the time when grandmother fed the sparrows. She would sit in the verandah breaking the bread into little bits. The sparrows would collect around her. They chirped noisily. Some perched on her legs and shoulders. Some even sat on her head. She relished this game. She never shooed them away.

Question 25. How did the grandmother see the narrator off at the railway station?

Answer: She was not at all sentimental. She kept silent and didn't show her emotions. Her lips moved in prayer and her fingers were busy telling the beads of her rosary. She only kissed the narrator's forehead. He cherished the moist imprint as perhaps the last sign-of physical contact between them.

Question 26. What was the "last sign" of physical contact between the author and the grandmother? Why did the author think that to be the last physical contact?

Answer: The grandmother, kissed Khushwant Singh on his forehead. The author thought that this was perhaps the last sign of physical contact between them. He was going away for five years. She was extremely old and at her age one could never tell whether she would be alive for long.

Question 27. Why didn't the grandmother pray in the evening on the day narrator came back home?

Answer: There was a strange change in her behaviour. She was over-excited. She celebrated the arrival of her grandson. She collected all the women of the neighborhood. For hours she continued singing and beating the drum. She had to be persuaded to stop to avoid overstraining. Perhaps it was the first time that she didn't pray.

Question 28. How did the grandmother die?

Answer: The grandmother realised that her end was near. She continued praying. Her fingers were busy in telling the beads of her rosary. She lay peacefully in bed. She did not talk to anyone. After sometime, her lips stopped moving. The rosary fell down from her fingers. She died peacefully.

Question 29. How did the sparrows show that they had not come for the bread?

OR

How did the sparrows pay their last homage to the grandmother?

Answer: The grandmother lay dead. Thousands of sparrows came there. They did not chirrup.

They paid their last homage to the old lady silently. She used to feed them regularly. The narrator's mother threw some crumbs of bread to them. They took no notice of them. As soon as the grandmother's corpse was carried off, they flew away quietly.

Question 30. Everybody including the sparrows mourned grandmother's death. Elaborate.

Answer: The old grandmother died peacefully. The members of the author's family mourned her death. Thousands of sparrows came and sat silently in the courtyard and the verandah where grandmother lay dead and wrapped in a red shroud. They took no notice of the bread crumbs thrown to them. They flew away quietly the moment grandmother's corpse was carried off.

B. Long Answer Type Questions

Question 1. Describe the friendship 'between Khushwant Singh and his grandmother.

Answer: Khushwant Singh's grandmother was closely involved in bringing him up when the author lived with her in the village during his early life. She used to wake him up early in the morning. While bathing and dressing him, she sang her prayers. She hoped that the young boy would learn it by heart. She then gave him breakfast—a stale chapatti with butter and sugar. Then they would go together to the temple school. While the author learnt his lesson, the grandmother would read holy books. They returned home together.

A turning point came in their friendship when his parents called them to city. Although they shared a room, she could not help him much. She hated music, Science and Western education. The common link of their friendship was gradually snapped.

Question 2. What image of the grandmother emerges from 'The Portrait of a Lady'?

Answer: Khushwant Singh's grandmother has been portrayed as a very old lady. She was short statured, fat and slightly bent. Her face was wrinkled and she was always dressed in spotless white clothes. She was a deeply religious lady. Her bps were always moving in a silent prayer. She was always telling the beads of her rosiary. She went to the temple and read the scriptures. The grandmother was a kind lady. She used to feed dogs in the village. In the city she took to feeding the sparrows. She had great affection for her grandson. She looked after him in the village. She could not adjust herself to the Western way of life, Science and English education. She hated music and was distressed to know that there was no teaching about God and holy books at Khushwant's new English school. On the whole, she was a nice, kind-hearted and religious lady.

Question 3. Write a character sketch of the author's grandmother by using following words: affectionate, caring, kind and benevolent, religious, a strong woman.

Answer: Khushwant Singh's grandmother was a very old lady. She was short, fat and slightly bent. Her face was wrinkled. She had white hair. She was very affectionate. She was closely involved in bringing up the author. The two lived in the village. She was a caring grandmother. She would wake him early in the morning and get him ready for school. She served him breakfast and took him to school. She waited for him in the temple. She prayed while he studied. She returned with him.

She was kind and benevolent. She used to feed dogs in the village. In the city she took to feeding the sparrows. She was a deeply religious lady. Her bps were always moving in a silent prayer. She was always telling the beads of her rosiary. She went to the temple and read the scriptures.

She was a strong woman with strong beliefs. Although she was not formally educated, she was serious about the author's education. She could not adjust herself to the western way of life, Science and English education. She hated music. She was distressed to know that there was no teaching about God and holy books at Khushwant's new English school. On the whole, she was a nice, affectionate, kind hearted and religious lady.

Question 4. The grandmother herself was not formally educated but was serious about the author's education. How does the text support this?

Answer: The grandmother was quite serious about the author's education. She woke him up in the morning and got him ready for school. She washed his wooden slate. She plastered it with yellow chalk. She tied his earthen ink-pot and reed pen into a bundle. She took him to school. He studied in school. She waited for him in the temple reading scriptures.

In the city, the author went to an English school in a motor bus. When he came back she would ask him what the teacher had taught him. She could not help him with his lessons. She did not believe in the things taught at the English school. She was distressed to learn that her grandson was being taught music. She considered it unfit for gentle folk.

Question 5. Gradually the author and the grandmother saw less of each other and their friendship was broken. Was the distancing in the relationship deliberate or due to demand of the situation?

Answer: During his boyhood, grandmother was a part of his life. He was completely dependent on her. The turning point in their friendship came when they went to city. Now, he went to school by bus. She no longer accompanied him. As the years rolled by they saw less of each other. For sometime she continued to wake him up and got him ready for school. When he came back she would ask him what the teachers had taught. She did not believe in the things that were taught at school. She was distressed that there was no teaching about God and the scriptures. She felt offended that music was also being taught. She expressed her disapproval silently.

After this she rarely talked to him. When he went up to university, he was given a room of his own. The common link of friendship was snapped. Now she spent most of her time at the spinning wheel. Thus we find that the distancing in the relationship was due to demand of situation. The graph of life never follows a straight line.

Question 6. The word 'portrait' generally means a painting, a drawing or a photograph but here it implies a representation or impression of someone in language. Write a pen picture of your grandparents describing the qualities you admire and appreciate most.

Answer: I am lucky that my grandparents are still alive. They live in our native village. My grandfather is about 70. My grandmother is about 65. My grandfather served in the army before he retired as a colonel 20 years ago. He is still active and smart. He has strong will power and manliness in the way he carries himself. He is fond of walking and jogging. He looks after the family farm and briefs the workers every morning. In the evening he asks each of them to report the progress and work done. He believes in trusting people. Even then he has some surprise checks. My grandmother is a bit fat and small. She is slow moving. She is deeply religious. She visits the temple every morning. She supervises the household work and activities. She helps the poor and the needy. She is kind, generous and hospitable. My grandparents visit us in the city on important days such as birthdays or marriage anniversaries etc. We spend a part of our holidays with them. Their company is a blessing.

Question 7. Imagine that you are Khushwant Singh. Record the changes that came in your relationship with your grandmother as you grew up from kid to university student.

Answer: During my boyhood days I lived with my grandmother in the village. She used to wake me up in the morning and prepared me for school. She accompanied me to school. A turning point came in our friendship when my parents sent for us in the city. Now I went to an English school in the motor bus. I was taught English, Science and music. She could not help me in my studies. She hated Science, music and Western education. We still shared the same room, but talked less and less. When I joined the university, I was given a separate room and our common link of closeness was finally snapped.