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Class 11 English (Hornbill) Notes

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Key Notes and Important Questions with Answers

Chapter-1

The Portrait of a Lady

By Khushwant Singh

The Portrait of a Lady' is written in first person and is in the biographical mode. In this story, the writer gives a detailed account of his Grandmother with whom he had a long association. Khushwant Singh recalls his Grandmother as short, fat and slightly bent. Her silver hair was scattered untidily on her wrinkled face. She hobbled around the house in white clothes with one hand resting on her waist and the other telling the beads of her rosary. Khushwant Singh remembers her as not very pretty but always beautiful. He compares her serene face to that of a winter landscape,

During their long stay in the village, Grandmother woke him up in the morning, plastered his wooden slate, prepared his breakfast, and escorted him to school. While he studied alphabets, she read the scriptures in the temple attached to the school. On their way back home she fed stale chapattis to stray dogs.

The turning point in their relationship came when they went to live in the city. Now, the author went to a city school in a motor bus and studied English, law of gravity, Archimedes' principle and many more things which she could not understand at all. Grandmother could no longer accompany him to school nor help him in his studies. She was upset that there was no teaching of God and scriptures at city school. Instead he was given music lesson which, according to her, was not meant for gentlefolk. But she said nothing.

When Khushwant Singh went to a university, he was given a separate room. The common link of their friendship was snapped. Grandmother rarely talked to anyone now. She spent most of her time sitting beside her spinning wheel, reciting prayers, and feeding the sparrows in the afternoon. When the author left for abroad, Grandmother did not get disturbed. Rather, she saw him off at the railway station. Seeing her old age, the narrator thought that it was his last meeting with her. But, contrary to his thinking, when he returned after a span of five years, Grandmother was there to receive him. She celebrated the occasion by singing songs of the home coming of warriors on an old dilapidated drum, along with the ladies of the neighbourhood.

Next morning she got ill. Although the doctor said it was a mild fever and would go away soon, she could foresee that her end was near. She did not want to waste time talking to anyone. She lay peacefully in bed praying and telling the beads till her lips stopped moving

and the rosary fell from her lifeless fingers. To mourn her death thousands of sparrows flew in and sat scattered around her body. There was no chirruping and when Khushwant Singh's mother threw breadcrumbs to the sparrows, they took no notice of the bread. They flew away quietly when the dead body of Grandmother was carried away for last rites.

Short Answer Questions

Answer the following questions in not more than 30-40 words.

1. Why does the narrator call his grandmother a 'winter landscape'?
2. How did Khushwant Singh portray his Grandfather in the lesson?
3. Which stories of Grandmother did the author treat as 'Fables of the Prophets'? Why?
4. The author and his Grandmother were good friends in the village. Support your answer with suitable examples from the text.
5. Describe the happiest half-hourof the day' for Grandmother.
6. 'We protested. But she ignored our protests'. Who protested and why? What was the result?
7. How did the sparrows react at the death of the author's Grandmother?
8. Mention instances from the lesson to prove that Grandmother was considerate towards animals.
9. Why was it hard for the author to believe that his Grandmother had once been young and pretty?
10. Grandmother had a divine beauty. How does the author bring this out?
11. Why did Grandmother always accompany the author to school in village]
12. Compare and contrast the routine of Grandmother in the village with that of it in the city.
13. Why did Grandmother disapprove of the 'things they taught' at the English school?
14. How did the move to the city prove to be the turning point in the grandmother-grandson relationship?
15. What change did Khushwant Singh's return from abroad bring in grand mother's routine?

16. What does the sparrow's behaviour highlight?

17. Mention some of the incidents from the lesson to show that Grandmother was very fond of her grandson.

Long Answer Questions

Answer the following in about 120 words.

1. Describe the changing relationship between the author and his Grandmother?

2. "Animals do recognize and value a relationship established with human beings". Write an article on "Animals and Human Beings" on the basis of the above statement.

3. The grandmother is a silent voice in the story. However, her actions reveal her personality. Draw a character sketch of Grandmother citing examples from the text.

4. What light does the lesson throw on Indian family values?

5. 'When people are pious, kind hearted and God fearing, even nature mourns their death'. Justify this statement with reference to The Portrait of a Lady'.

Chapter -1

The Portrait of a Lady by Khuswant singh

Short answer Type

Q.1. How did the grandmother spend her whole day?

Ans. The grand mother spend her whole day by getting her grandson ready for the school, making chapattis for him and dropping him to school. Besides, she always remained busy in reciting prayers and telling the beads of her rosary.

Q.2. Why was the grandmother so disturbed when the narrator started gong to the city school?

Ans. The grandmother was a religious lady who loved to read scriptures and tell the beads of the rosary. When her grandson told her about the subjects being taught at school. She felt offended and reacted strangely. According to her music was a monopoly of harlots and beggars.

Q.3. How did the sparrows express their sorrow when the author's grandmother died?

Ans. Author's grandmother was very fond of feeding sparrows with beads crumbs. When

the grandmother died, the sparrows did not take notice of bread crumbs and flew away without eating them. In this way, they expressed their sorrow at her death.

Q.4. How did the author's grandmother behave just before her death?

Ans. The author's grandmother had got a fair enough idea bout her upcoming death. Therefore, she decided not to waste even a single second while talking to her relatives but reciting the prayers and telling the beads of her rosary. She gave a clear signal to her family that she was no longer interested in talking to them.

Q.5. Why did the grandmother hate music?

Ans. Grandmother considered that music was indecent and was meant only for harlots and beggars. It was not meant for gentle folk or school children from respectable families.

Long Answers Type Questions

Q.6. Why was it hard to believe that the author's grandmother was young and pretty?

Ans. It was hard to believe that the author's grandmother was young and pretty because she author, as a young boy, had always seen her as an old lady. She was short statured and wrinkled all over. She had a quiet personality whom everybody respected. So, to imagine her as a young and a pretty girl was a revolting thought for the author.

Q.7. Why was the grand mother dissatisfied with the city's education?

Ans. The grand mother was dissatisfied with the city's education because they never taught about the scriptures and God. The teachers taught science, the law of gravity etc. which was not of much importance to her.

Q.8. What was the turning point in the author's and the grandmother's relationship?

Ans. The author had to be sent to a big city for education. This was the turning point in his and the grandmother's relationship. The author began to receive education in a English medium school. The grandmother could not assist him with his assignment and therefore, became withdrawn. She began to feel lonely and fed sparrows in her past time.