

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KHUSHWANT SINGH



Khushwant Singh (born Khushal Singh, 2 February 1915 – 20 March 2014) was an Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist and politician. His experience in the 1947 Partition of India inspired him to write *Train to Pakistan* in 1956 (made into film in 1998), which became his most well-known novel. Khushwant Singh was one of the prominent Indian writers and columnists. In the story the author draws a pen portrait of his grandmother. He has beautifully written an account of his relationship with his grandmother.

GIST OF THE LESSON

Appearance of the grandmother

- Old, short, fat and slightly bent.
- Her silver hair 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.
- author remembers her as not very pretty but always beautiful.
- He compares her calm and serene face to that of a winter landscape.

Daily routine (Childhood phase in village)

- During their long stay in the village
- Grandmother woke him up in the morning, plastered his wooden slate, prepared his breakfast, and accompanied 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 (Family moved to city)

- 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 neither 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 author 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.
- 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.

Last hours of her life

- Next morning she got a mild fever. She could foresee that her end was near.
- Peacefully kept on praying and telling the beads till her lips stopped moving and the rosary fell from her lifeless fingers.
- Sparrows paid their silent tribute
- To mourn her death thousands of sparrows flew in and sat scattered around her body.
- There was no chirruping and when author'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.

THEME

In the Portrait of a Lady by Khushwant Singh we have the theme of innocence, friendship, love, connection, kindness, selflessness, respect and acceptance.

WORD MEANING

1. Wrinkled- having lines or folds
2. Portrait- painting or picture
3. Mantelpiece- a structure of wood, marble, or stone above and around a fireplace.
4. the thought was almost revolting- it was very hard for the author to believe
5. Revolting – unpleasant
6. Absurd - Illogical
7. Fables- fictitious stories with a moral teaching
8. Criss- cross - a pattern of intersecting straight lines
9. Hobbled – walked in an awkward way
10. Stoop – bend one’s body forward
11. Rosary- a string of beads for keeping count of number of chants made of a religious prayer
12. Locks- hair
13. Scattered – disorganized
14. Untidily - not neat
15. Puckered – a face contract into wrinkles
16. Inaudible- unable to be heard
17. Serenity – the state of being peaceful and calm
18. an expanse of pure white serenity - refers to the calm, relaxed and peaceful character of the author’s grandmother
19. Contentment – a state of happiness and satisfaction
20. Monotonous – dull and boring
21. Bothered- to be concerned
22. Slate- a flat plate of slate formerly used for writing on in schools
23. Plastered- covered with a layer of plaster
24. Earthen- made of baked or fired clay
25. Stale- no longer fresh and pleasant to eat; hard, musty, or dry.
26. Scriptures - the sacred writings of a religion
27. Growling - making a low guttural sound in the throat
28. Courtyard- verandah
29. Years rolled by- time passed
30. Distressed - suffer from extreme sorrow, anxiety or pain
31. Lewd Association – Indecent or Obscene
32. Harlots – Prostitutes
33. Snapped- break suddenly and completely
34. Seclusion – the state of being private and away from the people

35. accepted her seclusion with resignation- the grandmother accepted a lonely life as she accepted the separation from her grandson without objection
36. Spinning-wheel - a household machine with a wheel attached to it for spinning yarn
37. A veritable bedlam of chirrupings - refers to the noise and confusion caused by the chirrupings of the sparrows
38. Chirrupings – the noise of a small bird
39. Perched - alight or rest on something
40. Shooed - make a person or animal go away by shouting or saying ‘shoo’
41. Sentimental - a feeling of nostalgia, sadness or tenderness; an emotional feeling
42. Beads - a small piece of glass or stone threaded with others to make a rosary or necklace
43. Cherished - hold something dear
44. Imprint - impression or stamp
45. Clasped – hold tightly
46. Frivolous – not having any serious purpose, light-hearted
47. Rebuke - disapproval of something or someone
48. frivolous rebukes - light hearted scoldings
49. Thumped- hit
50. the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum- The loose surface of the worn out drum
51. Persuade - to talk someone into doing something
52. Overstraining- overdoing something
53. Omitted - leave out or exclude something
54. Protested - express an objection against something or someone
55. Pallor – an unhealthy pale appearance
56. Customary - traditional
57. Crude – in a natural state, roughly made
58. Blaze - a very large burning fire
59. Shroud – a piece of cloth used to wrap a dead person
60. Corpse- dead body.

LESSON AT A GLANCE

