



ENTRI

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

RIYAS RASHEED

KHUSHWANT SINGH

- Indian author, lawyer, diplomat, journalist and politician
- His most well-known novel Train to Pakistan (1956) was inspired from Partition of India in 1947
- He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1974 & returned the award in 1984 in protest against Operation Blue Star
- In 2007, he was awarded the Padma Vibhushan

- He served as Member of Parliament in Rajya Sabha (1980-86)
- He died on 20 March 2014 at his Delhi residence, at the age of 99



The Portrait of a Lady

- It is a short story 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.
- 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

- 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

- 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.

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.

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.

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 homecoming 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.



THANK YOU