

Revision Notes
CHAPTER – 1
The Portrait of a Lady

Khushwant Singh is one of the prominent Indian writers and columnists. He has written on various themes and issues. In this lesson he gives a detailed account of his grandmother who had a long association with him. He had intimate relations with her since his childhood. Their friendship was broken when they had to move to the city. The English school, science and music did not appeal to her. The narrator went abroad for higher studies. His arrival after five years from abroad was an occasion for celebration. The old lady tired herself and fell ill. Her death was mourned not only by the narrator's family but also by the sparrows she fed regularly in the afternoon. The old, stout, short and a little bent grandmother is clad in white clothes and keeps on telling beads of her rosary.

During their long stay in village, the grandmother used to wake up the narrator in the morning and accompanied him to school. She took care of all small things and continued her regular prayers and reading of scriptures. On the way back home she fed stray dogs with stale chapatis. Circumstances did have a bearing on the relationship between the author and his grandmother. They had most intimate relationship when they were in the village. Shifting to city home was a turning point as it increased distances in their relationship. Now, the author was going to a city school and studying all modern day subjects. The grandmother was not able to help the author in his studies and she felt disturbed as there was no teaching of God and scriptures. As the years rolled by they saw less of each other. But their feelings for each other did not change. The grandmother was a very strong lady. She was very rigid in her ways so she did not like the modern ways of the city. She led her kind of life and never compromised with her kind of life. She loved the narrator deeply but never tried to be emotional and sentimental.

The grandmother devoted her time in praying, spinning and feeding sparrows. She did not get disturbed when the author was leaving for abroad and saw him off maintaining her peace and calm. After a span of five years the grandmother was there to receive him. She celebrated her grandson's home coming in an unusual way by beating a drum and singing.

She had a peaceful end and everyone including sparrows got grieved at the demise of a bold, religious, practicable, responsible and loving person. She was no more in this world but her memories kept her alive in the heart of the narrator.

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A Photograph

The poet describes a photograph that captures interesting moments of her mother's childhood when she went for a sea holiday with her two cousins. Poet draws a contrast between the sea in which the girls are standing and their transient feet to suggest shortness of human life and slow changing sea. Poet also recollects how her mother would have laughed at the photograph and felt disappointed at the loss of her childhood joys. Poet's mother has been dead for twelve years. In this situation she feels very sad and lonely. This loss has left her speechless. But she has learned to reconcile with this loss with great difficulty.

It throws light on the childhood of the poet's mother. She led a very beautiful and adventurous childhood. At the age of twelve she used to pass her sea holiday with her girl's cousins walking in shallow water at the beach. She wore very attractive and colourful dresses befitting the place and occasion.

The poem ends with a fact that everything changes with time. Some changes are taken as loss and make us unhappy. Photographs reflect the changes. Happiness and beauty are lost with the passage of time. They make the people sad and distorted. Change is the law of nature. Everything changes with time like physical beauty of a human being but natural beauty like beauty of a sea or mountains remains forever.