



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2026-27)
CLASS – XI
QUESTION BANK – THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

Chronological Timeline of Key Events

- **Early Childhood (Village Phase):**
 - The narrator and grandmother live together. She prepares him for school, bathes him, and sings prayers, believing education should be religious.
 - They walk to the temple school together. She feeds stale chapatis to village dogs on their way back.
- **Turning Point (Moving to City):**
 - Parents call them to the city. The close bond weakens.
 - He starts English school, studying science; she cannot help with studies and dislikes the lack of religious education.
 - She stops going to school with him and shifts to feeding sparrows in the courtyard.
- **University & Higher Studies:**
 - He goes to university and gets a private room. The "common link" of friendship is broken.
 - She accepts her seclusion with resignation, spending days at her spinning wheel and praying.
 - He leaves abroad for five years. She sees him off at the station, showing no emotion, only silent prayer.
- **Return & Final Moments:**
 - He returns; she celebrates by singing with a drum.
 - She falls ill, refuses to stop praying, and passes away peacefully.
 - Thousands of sparrows sit silently around her body before flying away, a sign of silent mourning.

Three Phases of Relationship

1. **Phase 1 (Village):** Close bond/friendship.
2. **Phase 2 (City):** Distance grows ("turning point").
3. **Phase 3 (University):** Complete separation/Seclusion.

Character	Description	Role
Grandmother	Deeply religious, caring, traditional, described as always old, wears white, recites prayers, feeds dogs and sparrows.	Central character; symbolizes love, devotion, and endurance of values.
Narrator	The author himself, describes his growth from childhood to adulthood and his changing relationship with his grandmother.	Main point of view; observer of generational change.
Mother & Father	Present but secondary; move to city, call the narrator and grandmother to join them.	Drive the shift from village to urban life.

THEMES IN THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

- **Generational Change:** Shift from rural traditions to urban modernity.
- **Unconditional Love:** The grandmother's affection for her grandson regardless of their differences.
- **Spirituality:** Her daily prayers and strong devotion to religious values.
- **Loneliness and Acceptance:** The dignified solitude the grandmother experiences near the end of her life.
- **Impact of Small Acts:** Her kindness to sparrows and dogs reflects gentle compassion.

SYMBOLISM AND THEMES

- **The Sparrows:** In a moving display of grief, thousands of sparrows sat in complete silence around her dead body, refusing to eat the bread crumbs, highlighting the special bond she shared with nature.
- **The Portrait:** She is described as "short, fat, and slightly bent," with her face a crisscross of wrinkles, embodying serenity and spiritual devotion.
- **Themes:** The story touches upon the changing relationships between generations, the loneliness of old age, and the comfort of faith.

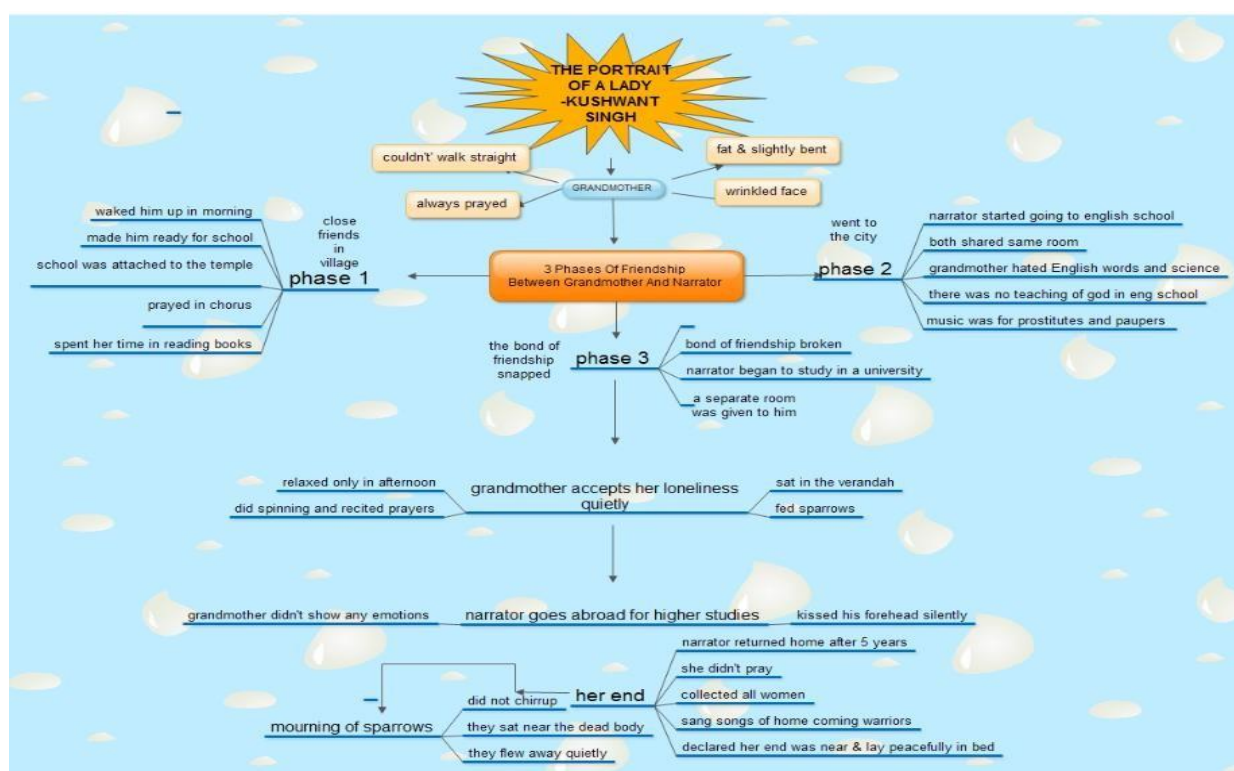
This story highlights that true love and care, like that of the grandmother, are timeless and profound, leaving a lasting impression.

MEANINGS OF THE PHRASES AND EXPRESSIONS USED IN THE STORY

- the thought was almost revolting – The thought that the author's grandmother was once young and pretty raises a doubt in the mind of the author. He finds it too hard to believe.
- an expanse of pure white serenity – It refers to the calm, peaceful and serene character and conduct of the author's grandmother. She is compared to the peaceful winter landscape in the mountains.
- a turning-point – It refers to the point where the author's relationship with his grandmother changes drastically after they move to the city-house.

- accepted her seclusion with resignation – This shows the author’s grandmother’s passive submission to her secluded life after she gradually loses touch with her grandson.
- the sagging skins of the dilapidated drum – It points to the shabby and deteriorated condition of the drum.
- a veritable bedlam of chirruping – It refers to the noise, confusion and chaos caused by the chirruping of the sparrows that scattered and perched around the author’s grandmother.
- frivolous rebukes – It refers to the casual and light-hearted rebukes of the grandmother to the sparrows.

MIND MAP



Question 1: Mention 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 given below. The first phase was the period of the author’s early childhood. During this phase, he used to live with his grandmother in the village. The grandmother used to take care of him from waking him up and getting him ready to accompanying him to the school. Both shared a good friendship with each other. The second phase was the time when the author and the grandmother moved to the city to live with author’s parents. This was a turning-point in their friendship because now they ‘saw less of each other’. The third phase was the time the author joined University. He was given a room of his own and the common link of their friendship was snapped. The grandmother turns to wheel-spinning and reciting prayers all day long. She accepts her seclusion with silence.

Question 2: Mention three reasons why the author’s grandmother was disturbed when he started going to the city school.

ANSWER: The author’s grandmother was unhappy after knowing that the things taught to him at school were related to western science and learning. Secondly, she did not believe such things that were taught at his new school. She was disturbed that there was no teaching about God and scriptures. Thirdly, she was unhappy with the idea of music lessons being given at school. She considered music suitable only for the people with low dignity. The disapproval of the grandmother was visible in her silence.

Question 3: Mention three ways in which the author’s grandmother spent her days after he grew up.

ANSWER: The author’s grandmother “accepted her seclusion with resignation”. She spent her days of loneliness by engaging herself in the wheel-spinning activity, reciting prayers and feeding the sparrows.

Question 4: Mention the odd way in which the author’s grandmother behaved just before she died.

ANSWER: She had omitted to pray; she was not going to waste any more time talking to them. She lay peacefully in bed praying and telling her beads. Even before they could suspect, her lips stopped moving and the rosary fell from her lifeless fingers.

Question 5: Mention the way in which the sparrows expressed their sorrow when the author’s grandmother died.

ANSWER: The author’s grandmother shared a unique bond with the sparrows. She seemed at her happiest self while feeding the sparrows. The day the author’s grandmother died, thousands of sparrows sat scattered around her dead body. They sat there in utter silence mourning the death of the grandmother. They took no notice of the bread crumbs thrown at them and flew away silently after the body was carried for the final rites. Next morning, the bread crumbs were swept away into the dustbin by the sweeper.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

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 religious lady with a kind heart. She moved about in the house “telling the beads of her rosary”. Her lips constantly moved in “inaudible prayer”. She said her morning prayers in monotonous sing-song hoping that the author would learn it by heart. Every day, she went along with the author to his school and sat in the temple that was attached to it, reading the holy books for hours. She believed in the teachings about God and scriptures and did not like that her grandson was not taught about them in the city school. Gradually, she turned to reciting prayers throughout the day. Before dying, she stopped talking to her family members and turned to prayers, and counting the beads.

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

ANSWER: The story describes the entire phase of relationship shared by the author and his

grandmother. In his early childhood, the author shared a strong bond with his grandmother. However, that tie of friendship loosened a little when they both shifted to his parents' city house. She no longer accompanied him to the school and could not help him with his lessons. There was a further crack in the relationship when the author joined university as he was given a private room and the common link between them was snapped. They were further distanced from each other when the author went abroad for five years. In spite of changes in the course of the relationship (due to the demands of the situation), their feelings for each other remained unchanged. Though she did not display her emotions, when the author was leaving for abroad, she wholeheartedly celebrated his homecoming when he returned.

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, the author's grandmother was a person strong in character. The instances to prove this are given below.

- The author's grandmother was a person strong in character. She was a picture of contentment.
- She had her own thoughts about the learning at school. She considered the teaching of scriptures to be more fruitful than science and music.
- In her phase of loneliness and seclusion, she took to wheel-spinning and feeding sparrows.
- She appeared composed and did not display any emotion when the author decided to go abroad for studies.
- Ignoring everyone who tried to stop her, she sang for several hours celebrating the home-coming of her grandson.
- During the last few hours of her life, ignoring the protests of her family members, she stopped talking to everyone and took to reciting prayers and telling her beads.

ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN 100-120 WORDS.

1. Draw a character sketch of Khushwant Singh's grandmother as portrayed by him in the lesson 'The Portrait of a Lady'.

Ans: The narrator's grandmother was a true picture of love, affection and care. She had all those virtues which grandmother's generally have for their grandsons. She was highly religious but a conservative lady. The grandmother presented a picture of peace and contentment. Her spotless white dress and her silver white hair gave her spiritual beauty. The grandmother was not physically very attractive. She had deep love and affection for her grandson. She got him ready for the school and came back home with him. She was a very religious lady. She was always telling the beads of her rosary. She had compassion even for animals and birds. She fed the village dogs. She took to feeding the sparrows in the city. But the grandmother was a conservative lady. She didn't like the English language and Science. She hated music. She associated music with prostitutes and beggars.

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

Ans: The grandmother was not formally educated but was serious about the author's education. She could read the scriptures. She realized the value of education and did not let

the author miss school. She woke him up each morning, bathed him, dressed him, plastered his wooden slate, gave him breakfast and walked him to school where he was taught the alphabet and morning prayers. While he sat in the veranda learning, the grandmother read her scriptures. In the city, she could not accompany him to school as he went by the school bus. He was now in an English school, where they taught science. She could not understand English and did not believe in science. The fact that they were not taught about God made her unhappy. Khushwant Singh's music lessons in school upset her over its lewd associations. She took an interest in the author's education.

VALUE BASED QUESTIONS

Q. Aged people should not be left behind and every effort should be made that they live with their children and grandchildren. This will inculcate a proper understanding between the old and the new generation. Write your views.

Ans. The aged people feel the need for physical, Moral, financial and emotional support from their children. they are left alone by their children quite often to lead a lonely life. Even their virtues become major vices. When the aged are left alone, a fathomless gap appears between them and their children. the temporary separation which may be the outcome of circumstances are good as it enhances love and respect. The elderly live in their own world and it is difficult to change their lifestyle. They want nothing from the new generation except love and respect. It is true that our new generation has its priorities but they must not become indifferent to the needs of the aged. When the aged live with their children, there comes a change in their outlook. Being experienced they try to adapt themselves to the new environment. A solution of old age problems lies not in building old age homes but giving them a little care, affection and love. We must remember that we, too, will be like them one day. A thorough change of attitude is needed. The new generation can enrich itself by listening to the experiences of the elderly and they, in turn, can learn a lot about modern gadgets and things from the young. This will help in bridging the generation gap and give away to a healthy and happy society.

Extract Based questions 1

"She had always been short and fat and slightly bent. Her face was a crisscross of wrinkles running from everywhere to everywhere."

Q1. What does the description of the grandmother's appearance suggest about her age?

A1. She was very old, a condition that had remained constant for the twenty years the author had known her.

Q2. What does the term "crisscross of wrinkles" imply?

A2. It implies she had a heavily wrinkled face due to extreme old age.

Q3. How does the narrator describe her in this passage?

A3. He describes her as short, fat, slightly bent, and having a wrinkled face, wearing spotless white clothing.

Extract 2

"This was a turning point in our friendship. Although we shared the same room, my grandmother no longer came to school with me."

Q1. What was the "turning point"?

A1. The turning point was moving to the city to live with the author's parents, which severed the routine of going to school together.

Q2. Why did the grandmother stop going to school with the narrator?

A2. The narrator started going to a city school by motor bus, and she could no longer accompany him.

Q3. How did their relationship change after this?

A3. They shared the same room, but the grandmother became less involved in his studies, particularly as she disapproved of western learning and music.

Extract 3

"The next morning she was dead. ... In the evening a change came over her. She did not pray."

Q1. What was unusual about the evening before the grandmother's death?

A1. She skipped her prayers and collected neighbourhood women to sing songs of the homecoming of warriors, overstraining herself.

Q2. How did the sparrows respond to the grandmother's death?

A2. The sparrows were silent, and they did not chirp or eat the breadcrumbs that were thrown to them, appearing to mourn her death.

Q3. What kind of a lady was the grandmother?

A3. She was deeply religious, compassionate, and closely connected to nature, as seen through her daily prayers and habit of feeding animals.

ASSERTION & REASONING QUESTIONS

1. Assertion (A): The narrator found it hard to believe that his grandmother was once young and pretty.

Reason (R): The grandmother had been old and wrinkled for the twenty years that the narrator had known her.

- a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- b) A is true but R is false
- c) Both A and R are false
- d) Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A.

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.

2. Assertion (A): The move to the city was a "turning point" in the friendship between the narrator and his grandmother.

Reason (R): In the city, the narrator started going to an English school, and they shared a room, allowing them to spend more time together.

- a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.
- b) Both A and R are false
- c) A is true but R is false
- d) Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A.

- **Answer:** (c) A is true, but R is false. (Reasoning: They spent *less* time together in the

city, not more).

3. Assertion (A): The grandmother was disturbed by the education in the city school.

Reason (R): She did not believe in the things they taught, specifically the absence of teaching about God and scriptures.

a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.

b) A is true but R is false

c) Both A and R are false

d) Both A and R are true but R is not the correct explanation of A.

Answer: (a) Both A and R are true, and R is the correct explanation of A.

Key Figures of Speech and Examples:

- **Simile:** A direct comparison using 'like' or 'as'.
 - *"...like the winter landscape in the mountains..."*: Compares the grandmother's calm, white-clad appearance to a peaceful winter scene.
 - *"Like everyone's grandmother..."*: Compares his grandmother to the typical image of elderly grandmothers.
- **Metaphor:** A direct comparison without 'like' or 'as'.
 - *"...an expanse of pure white serenity..."*: Describes her serene, quiet presence and white clothing as an abstract, peaceful landscape.
 - *"A veritable bedlam of chirruping..."*: Metaphorically describes the chaotic noise of sparrows as a "bedlam" (uproar).
- **Imagery:** Vivid descriptive language that appeals to the senses.
 - The author uses visual imagery to portray her as "short, fat, and slightly bent," with "silver hair" to emphasize her old age.
- **Personification:** Giving human qualities to inanimate objects or concepts.
 - The way the sparrows gathered, which is later described as mourning, acts as a form of emotional personification for the birds.
- **Symbolism:** Using objects to represent larger ideas.
 - **The Rosary:** Symbolizes her deep, continuous spiritual devotion and peace.
 - **White Clothing/Spotless White:** Symbolizes purity, peace, and spiritual grace.

Other Phrases & Literary Techniques:

- **"Accepted her seclusion with resignation"**: Imagery of her peaceful acceptance of loneliness.
- **"Turning-point"**: Symbolizes the shift in their relationship.
- **"The thought was almost revolting"**: Used to describe the idea of her being young.

