

FICTION

1

HOW I TAUGHT MY GRANDMOTHER TO READ

► By Sudha Murty

Summary

The writer was twelve years old and she used to stay with her grandparents in north Karnataka. Since there were very few diversions, the entire family would eagerly wait for a weekly magazine called *Karamveera*. This magazine was publishing famous writer Triveni's novel, '*Kashi Yatre*' as a serial. The novel dealt with the protagonist's struggle to visit Kashi. Since grandmother believed in Kashi-Yatra as a pilgrimage, she could identify with the trials and tribulations of the main characters. Every Wednesday, the writer would read the next episode of the story to her. The grandmother would not only listen with great attention but also memorize it by heart. Later she would discuss it with friends in the temple courtyard.

One day the writer had to go to the neighbouring village for a cousin's wedding and stayed back there for a week. When she returned, she was surprised to see her grandmother in tears. At night, the grandmother narrated how her past life, feeding and bringing up children, kept her busy, sparing no time for education of any kind. Moreover, education for girls was not considered as important in those days. Without the granddaughter, she had a tough time trying to decipher and guess the next episode of '*Kashi Yatre*'. She had felt very desperate and helpless, mutely gazing at the pictures, unable to read a single word.

This incident fanned the grandmother's desire to learn the Kannada alphabet and she vowed to learn it by Dasser. The granddaughter's pleas, her mockery of the grandmother's age, all fell on deaf ears. No wonder, the grandmother proved to be an ideal student. In no time, she could read, repeat and write Kannada. The writer presented her with a copy of the novel '*Kashi Yatre*' as a token of appreciation and grandmother touched the feet of her granddaughter, her teacher, as a befitting tribute.

सारांश

लेखिका बारह वर्ष की थीं और अपने दादा-दादी के साथ उत्तर कर्नाटक में रहती थीं। वहाँ मनोरंजन के साधन बहुत कम थे, इसलिए सारा परिवार एक साप्ताहिक पत्रिका 'कर्मवीर' की बड़े उत्साह के साथ प्रतीक्षा करता था। यह पत्रिका एक प्रसिद्ध लेखिका, त्रिवेणी जी के उपन्यास 'काशी यात्रा' को धारावाहिक के रूप में प्रकाशित कर रही थी। इस उपन्यास की मुख्य पात्र काशी यात्रा के लिए संघर्ष कर रहा थीं। दादी माँ काशी यात्रा को तीर्थ यात्रा का महत्त्व देती थीं,

इसलिए उन्हें मुख्य पात्रों की मुसीबतों और संघर्ष से पूर्ण सहानुभूति थी। हर बुधवार को लेखिका अपनी दादी को अगला अंश पढ़कर सुनाती थीं। दादी माँ केवल मुग्ध होकर सुनती ही नहीं थीं बल्कि उसे कंठस्थ भी कर लेती थीं। बाद में वह मंदिर के प्रांगण में मित्रों के साथ उस पर विचार-विमर्श भी करती थीं।

एक बार लेखिका को अपने चचेरे भाई की शादी में पास ही के गाँव में जाना पड़ा और वह वहाँ एक सप्ताह रुक गई। जब वह लौटीं तो उन्हें अपनी दादी के आँसू देखकर बड़ा आश्चर्य हुआ। दादी ने उन्हें रात्रि में बताया कि कैसे अपनी युवावस्था में बच्चों को पालने-पोसने और देखभाल के कारण उनको किसी प्रकार की शिक्षा प्राप्त करने का अवसर नहीं मिला। वस्तुतः उस समय में लड़कियों की शिक्षा को आवश्यक नहीं समझा जाता था। अपनी पौत्री के बिना दादी 'काशी यात्रा' का अगला अंश न तो पढ़ पाई और न समझ पाई। वह असहाय और बेबस होकर केवल चित्रों को देखती रहीं और एक भी अक्षर न पढ़ पाई।

इस घटना के बाद दादी को कन्नड़ वर्णमाला सीखने की तीव्र इच्छा हुई और उन्होंने उसे दशहरा पर्व तक सीखने का प्रण लिया। उनकी पौत्री की विनती, उसका अपनी दादी की उम्र का उपहास, कुछ भी उन्हें अपने निर्णय से डिगा न सका। वह एक बहुत ही परिश्रमी और आदर्श विद्यार्थी निकलीं। थोड़े ही समय में वह कन्नड़ पढ़ने, दोहराने और लिखने लगीं। लेखिका ने अपनी दादी को "काशी यात्रा" का पूरा उपन्यास भेंट और प्रशंसा के रूप में दिया और दादी ने अपनी पौत्री के पैर छूकर उसे अपने गुरु के रूप में धन्यवाद दिया।

Word-Meaning

- **Convincing** – leaving no margin for doubt
- **Complex** – not easy to understand
- **Ardent** – having strong and passionate feelings
- **Episode** – an event or a group of events happening as a part of a sequence
- **Protagonist** – the main character in the story
- **Savouring** – enjoying a feeling or experience thoroughly
- **Regret** – to feel disappointed about
- **Accompanies** – to be with
- **Embarrassed** – To feel awkward or ashamed
- **Independent** – not dependent on others
- **Deadline** – time or date by which a particular task is to be completed
- **Overcome** – to succeed in dealing with a problems
- **Obstacle** – thing that makes something difficult to do
- **Reverse** – opposite
- **Scriptures** – the sacred writings

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

1. Now that you have enjoyed reading the story, answer the following questions by choosing the correct option.

(a) The grandmother could relate to the central character of the story 'Kashi Yatre' as _____ .

- (i) both were old and uneducated.
- (ii) both had granddaughters who read to them.
- (iii) both had a strong desire to visit Kashi.
- (iv) both were determined to learn to read.

Ans : (iii) both had a strong desire to visit Kashi.

(b) Why did the women at the temple discuss the latest episode of 'Kashi Yatre'?

- (i) To pass their time.
- (ii) The writer, Triveni, was very popular
- (iii) They could relate with the protagonist of the serial.
- (iv) Women have a habit of discussing serials.

Ans : (iii) They could relate with the protagonist of the serial.

(c) The granddaughter found her grandmother in tears on her return as _____ .

- (i) the grandmother had been unable to read the story 'Kashi Yatre' on her own.
- (ii) the grandmother had felt lonely.
- (iii) the grandmother wanted to accompany her granddaughter.
- (iv) she was sad she could not visit Kashi.

Ans : (i) the grandmother had been unable to read the story 'Kashi Yatre' on her own.

(d) Why did the grandmother touch her granddaughter's feet?

- (i) As a mark of respect to her teacher.
- (ii) It was a custom in their family.
- (iii) Girls should be respected.
- (iv) She had read the story of 'Kashi Yatre' to her.

Ans : (i) As a mark of respect to her teacher.

2. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) What made Triveni a popular writer?

Ans : Triveni was very famous because her stories generally dealt with psychological problems of ordinary

people. Her writing style was very easy, interesting and convincing. She was the best known novelist in Kannada literature.

(b) Why did the grandmother depend on her granddaughter to know the story?

Ans : The grandmother was not literate and had no knowledge of Kannada alphabet. Every Wednesday, the granddaughter would read the next episode of grandmother's favourite story 'Kashi Yatre' and the grandmother would try to memorise it.

(c) Pick out two sentences which state that the grandmother was desperate to know what happened in the story.

Ans : (i) I saw the picture that accompanies the story of 'Kashi Yatre'. I couldn't understand anything that was written.

(ii) I rubbed my hands over the pages

(d) Could the grandmother succeed in accomplishing her desire to read? How?

Ans : Yes, the grandmother's dedication, diligence and determination made her learn the Kannada alphabet before the deadline i.e. the Dassara festival. She proved to be an ideal student who was also very persevering and could recite, write and read the alphabet fluently.

(e) Which of the following traits would be relevant to the character of the narrator's grandmother?

(i) determined (ii) selfish (iii) emotional (iv) mean

Ans : Determined and Emotional-

(i) determined, because the grandmother proved that despite her age she was no less than a young student, who could learn all aspects of learning with equal ease.

(ii) Emotional : Her involvement with the trials of the main character and feelings that upset her at not being able to read.

3. Here are some direct quotations from the story. Identify the speaker and write what each quotation suggests about the speaker. You can use the adjectives given in the box and may also add your own.

amiable, tender, gentle, sympathetic, understanding, determined, diligent, kind, concerned, systematic, wise, helpful, enthusiastic, selfish, cruel, humble, religious, prudent

	Speaker	Quotation	Quality Highlighted
(a)		'Avva, is everything all right? Are you O.K.?'	
(b)		'At times, I used to regret not going to school, so I made sure that my children and grandchildren studied well.'	
(c)		'Avva, don't cry. What is the matter? Can I help you in anyway?'	
(d)		'We are well-off, but what use is money when I cannot be independent.'	
(e)		'I will keep Saraswati Pooja day during Dassara as the deadline.'	
(f)		'For a good cause if you are determined you can overcome any obstacle.'	
(g)		'I am touching the feet of a teacher, not my granddaughter.'	

Ans : (a) Speaker : The Narrator

Quality Highlighted : Sympathetic; tender;
concerned

(b) Speaker : The Grandmother

Quality Highlighted : Wise; helplessness; sense
of sacrifice

(c) Speaker : The Narrator

Quality Highlighted : Helpful; concerned;
sympathetic; amiable

(d) Speaker : The Grandmother

Quality Highlighted : Wise; prudent;
understanding

(e) Speaker : The Grandmother

Quality Highlighted : Determined; systematic,
focussed

(f) Speaker : The Grandmother

Quality Highlighted : Determined, enthusiastic;
diligent

(g) Speaker : The Grandmother

Quality Highlighted : Humble; traditional;
religious

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow by choosing the option you consider the most appropriate.

1. 'Her stories usually dealt with complex psychological problems in the lives of ordinary people and were always very interesting.'

(a) Who is 'her' referred to ?

- (i) Krishtakka (ii) Triveni
(iii) Narrator (iv) None of the above

(b) What was the person referred to here, by profession?

- (i) Writer (ii) Doctor
(iii) Social Worker (iv) Teacher

(c) How many years ago did the person referred to here die?

- (i) Ten years (ii) Thirty years
(iii) Forty years (iv) Sixty years

Ans : (a) (ii) (b) (i) (c) (iii)

2. "Many times, I rubbed my hands over the pages wishing they could understand what was written."

[CBSE 2010 (Term 1)]

(a) The 'I' in the above lines refers to :

- (i) Sudha Murthy (ii) Triveni
(iii) Krishtakka (iv) Saraswati

(b) The 'pages' were of a :

- (i) Kannada Newspaper
(ii) Magazine
(iii) Novel 'Kashi Yatre'
(iv) Weekly magazine 'Karmaveera'

(c) "Rubbing my hands over the pages" suggests the speaker's :

- (i) disappointment (ii) desperation
(iii) deep yearning (iv) regret

Ans. (a) (iii) (b) (iv) (c) (ii)

3. "Later, she could repeat the entire text by heart."
[CBSE 2010 (Term 1)]

(a) 'She' is referred to :

- (i) Sudha Murthy
- (ii) Sudha Murthy's classmate
- (iii) Sudha Murthy's grandmother
- (iv) Sudha Murthy's neighbour

(b) The 'text' is referred to :

- (i) Holy scriptures (ii) Text-books
- (iii) Homework
- (iv) The story of the episode

(c) The speaker intends to :

- (i) highlight memory of the girl
- (ii) highlight memory of the grandmother
- (iii) say that girl was so fascinated with the episodes of the novel
- (iv) tell that grandmother was very much fascinated with the episodes of the novel

Ans. (a) (iii) (b) (iv) (c) (iv).

4. "I knew my student had passed with flying colours."
[CBSE 2010 (Term 1)]

(a) 'my student' refers to :

- (i) Duke (ii) Triveni
- (iii) Avva (iv) Jeanne

(b) The student has passed in :

- (i) Flying colours (ii) Class
- (iii) Exam (iv) Life

(c) I knew that my student has passed when she :

- (i) Could read on her own
- (ii) Could write on her own
- (iii) Paid the fee (iv) Stopped the classes

Ans. (a) (iii) (b) (iv) (c) (i)

5. "I have decided I want to learn the Kannada alphabet from tomorrow onwards. I will work very hard."
[CBSE 2010 (Term 1)]

(a) The speaker wants to learn Kannada alphabet _____

- (i) To be able to read a novel on her own
- (ii) To be able to write a novel on her own
- (iii) To be able to teach others.
- (iv) As the speaker can read other languages fluently but not Kannada.

(b) The above statement reveals that the speaker is _____

- (i) Humorous (ii) Helpful
- (iii) Determined (iv) Concerned

(c) At the time of speaking these lines she was _____

- (i) 61 years old (ii) 62 years old
- (iii) 63 years old (iv) 64 years old

Ans. (a) (i) (b) (iii) (c) (ii)

6. "I will work harder than anybody but I will do it."

(a) The speaker has decided to learn :

- (i) to walk (ii) to speak Hindi
- (iii) to read (iv) to act

(b) The speaker is addressing :

- (i) Maid (ii) Marcy Hooper
- (iii) Sudha Murthy (iv) Jeanne

(c) From the line, speaker's _____ is reflected :

- (i) Determination (ii) Personality
- (iii) Attitude (iv) Stubbornness

Ans. (a) (iii) (b) (iii) (c) (i)

NON-MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Read the extracts and answer the questions that follow.

1. "I was surprised, for I had never seen her cry even in the most difficult situations."

(a) Who is 'Her' referred to here ?

Ans. 'Her' refers to the narrator's grandmother.

(b) Which quality of 'her' was revealed to the narrator at this moment ?

Ans. This reveals her helplessness because in the absence of the narrator she was unable to read the next episode of 'Kashi Yatre'.

(c) What was the reason which made 'her' cry ?

Ans. She cried because being uneducated she was unable to read the next episode of 'Kashi Yatre' in the

absence of her granddaughter.

2. "We would eat and play endlessly, savouring the freedom."

(a) 'We' here refers to whom ?

Ans. We here refers to the narrator and her cousins.

(b) Which occasion is being talked about here ?

Ans. A wedding ceremony in the neighbouring village of the narrator is being talked about here.

(c) What led to 'savouring the freedom' ?

Ans. The narrator and her cousins enjoyed the freedom they experienced in the wedding ceremony in their neighbouring village.

3. “She bent down and touched my feet. I was surprised and taken aback.”

(a) Who bent down to touch narrator’s feet ?

Ans. Her grandmother bent down to touch narrator’s feet.

(b) What was the ‘feeling within’ when ‘she’

touched the girl’s feet ?

Ans. It was the feeling of respect for a teacher who had taught her to read Kannada alphabet.

(c) What had the speaker done ?

Ans. The speaker had taught her grandmother to read Kannada alphabets so that she was able to read ‘Kashi Yatre’.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. Why could the grandmother not be educated? Give reasons.

Ans. When the grandmother was young, education for girls was not considered as essential, so she was never sent to the school. Moreover, she got married at a very young age and had a busy life. Later, when she had the grandchildren, she just felt happy cooking and feeding them. So, her education was never thought of by anyone.

2. For what did the grandmother set Dassara festival as a deadline?

Ans. In the absence of her granddaughter, the grandmother had felt too dependent and helpless as she could not read the next episode of ‘Kashi Yatre’. Due to this miserable feeling, she decided to learn the Kannada alphabet for which she kept Dassara as the deadline by then she should be able to read ‘Kashi Yatre’ on her own.

3. Explain the statement, “I knew then that my student had passed with flying colours” in the context of the lesson.

Ans. When the granddaughter gave the novel to her grandmother, she opened it and read immediately the title ‘Kash Yatre’ by Triveni and the publisher’s name. The author knew then that her student had passed with the flying colours, i.e., she had been successful at learning the Kannada alphabet.

4. The grandmother remained steadfast in her decision despite her granddaughter’s mockery? Why?

Ans. Inspite of her granddaughter’s mockery, the grandmother remained steadfast in her decision to study because she believed that if one is determined for a good cause, one can overcome any obstacle irrespective of the age. She was determined to learn the alphabet, no matter how much hard work she would have to do for it.

5. Describe the grandmother’s desperation when she was not able to read ‘Kashi Yatre’.

Ans. When the grandmother was not able to read ‘Kashi Yatre’, she felt a vacuum in her life. She was a tough lady and had never cried even in the most difficult situations, but she cried at the helplessness of not being able to read. This desperation led her to decide upon learning the alphabet, even though she was sixty-two-years old.

6. But I know it was not possible. If only I was educated enough..... Describe the circumstances that made the grandmother realise the importance of education.

When grandmother was young, education for girls was not considered as essential, so she never went to school. Once her granddaughter presented her ‘Kashi Yatre’ which had been published as a serial in a magazine. She identified herself with the protagonist. Her granddaughter used to read the story to her. Once her granddaughter was away. She was unable to read ‘Kashi Yatre’, she felt a vacuum in her life. Then she realised the importance of education.

7. What major Hindu belief did Triveni revolve her story around ?

The story revolves around a belief, prevailing among most of the Hindus, that going to Kashi and worshipping Lord Vishweshwara is the ultimate ‘Nirvana’. ‘Kashi Yatre’ is a story of an old lady’s struggle who had a strong desire to go to Kashi but could not do so because she spent the money she had saved for the purpose in helping a poor girl getting married.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. The granddaughter proves to be a catalyst in the grandmother’s pursuit of knowledge. Discuss.

Ans. A lot of credit in helping the grandmother in her pursuit of knowledge goes to the granddaughter. She only used to read out the episodes of the story of ‘Kashi Yatre’ every week to her grandmother. She took up the challenge

of teaching the Kannada alphabet to her grandmother. The grandmother had kept Dassera festival as a deadline to learn reading. She worked with full devotion – reading, repeating, writing and reciting and the granddaughter gave full support to her. Finally, the grandmother was able to read ‘Kashi Yatre’ by herself.

2. Why does the grandmother identify with the protagonist of the 'Kashi Yatre'? What does this tell you about her character?

Ans. 'Kashi Yatre' was a story of the struggle of an old lady who had a strong desire to go to Kashi or Varanasi but could not do so because she spent the money she had saved for the purpose, in helping a poor orphan get married. There is a belief among most of the Hindus that going to Kashi and worshipping Lord Vishweshwara is the ultimate 'punya'. The grandmother had never been to Kashi. Like all other Hindus, she also had a desire to visit Kashi, but was anyway happy cooking and feeding her grandchildren. That is why she identifies herself, with the protagonist of 'Kashi Yatre'. This shows that she is a religious lady, who is very loving and affectionate.

3. The grandmother believes in scriptures and Hindu mythology, yet she touches the feet of her granddaughter. Why?

Ans. According to the Hindu scriptures, touching the feet of elders is considered as a sign of respect. Normally, elders never touch the feet of youngsters. But the grandmother touched the feet of her granddaughter as a mark of respect because she had been her teacher. The grandmother believed that the granddaughter deserved the respect as she had taught her so well and with so much affection that she had made her confident and independent enough to read any novel all by herself.

4. Give a character-sketch of the grandmother as depicted in the lesson, "How I Taught My Grandmother To Read."

Ans. Grandmother is the central character, the fulcrum around which the entire lesson revolves. She is sixty-two years old, grey-haired, wrinkled and all her life is devoted to the kitchen-chores and well-being of her family. Her lifestyle is mundane, ordinary and routine. Triveni, the famous Kannada writer, acts as the only rainbow to her humdrum life. The novel 'Kashi Yatre' stirs in her, yearnings for a visit to Kashi, the ultimate Pooja for Hindus. The sufferings of the protagonist find a ready echo in the grandmother's heart and she identifies with the suffering of the main character.

The grandmother is not only religious, but also believes in worshipping Lord Vishweshwara and performing rituals. She is a lady of great commitment, courage and indomitable spirit, which is evident in her desire to master Kannada alphabet, even at the age of sixty-two. Determined, fiercely independent, she hates being helpless and desperate. That is why she never asks anyone else to read out the story in the entire village. She diagnoses the weakness that comes in her way and decides to learn the Kannada alphabet immediately. Her desperation over her inability to know the next episode of *Kashi Yatre*, her rubbing of hand over the pictures and words, is very evocative, it expresses her intense desire for learning. Triveni awakens her dormant desire for literature

and education. The grandmother not only proves to be an ideal and diligent student but also preaches by precept that "One is never too old to learn and a teacher is the most revered one, irrespective of age."

5. As grandmother in the story 'How I Taught My Grandmother to Read' write a diary entry on your transformation.

OR

You are the grandmother. Write your feelings in your diary when your granddaughter gave you the novel 'Kashi Yatre'. [CBSE 2010 (TERM 1)]

Dear Diary

25th August 2011

I am on Cloud Nine today because I am able to read the episode of 'Kashi Yatre' on my own. I remember the day when my granddaughter presented me the magazine in which the novel 'Kashi Yatre' was published in a serial. Since I was uneducated, she used to read every episode to me. Just like the main protagonist of the novel I also had a strong desire to visit Kashi but could not do so for one reason or the other. I identified myself with the protagonist and became so interested in the novel that I eagerly waited for the magazine so that my granddaughter could read the next episode to me. Once she was away at a wedding, I felt helpless as I couldn't read the story. There and then I decided to learn Kannada alphabets and it was my granddaughter who did the needful. And see the result Oh! I am feeling so light, so independent! I am thankful to my granddaughter. Had she not presented me the magazine, this day would never have come to my life.

6. Imagine you are the grandmother. In about 150 words, write a letter to share your thoughts, feelings, ambitions and resolutions as a neo-literate.

[CBSE 2010 (Term 1)]

Dear Krishna

How are you? I am writing this letter to give you a thrilling news — I have learned to read Kannada alphabets as you know that we could not go to school because at that time education for girls was not considered essential. Till Sudha presented me the magazine in which 'Kashi Yatre' was published even I never felt its important. But afterwards I got so interested in the novel that I used to wait for the next episode so that Sudha was able to read that to me. But once in her absence, I could not read it. It left a void in my life. This fanned my desire to learn. There and then I decided to read and see the result! I am independent now at the age of 62. I suggest you also should try your hand at learning Kannada alphabets. I feel so great to be able to read and write that I have decided to spend some time in teaching the ladies of my neighbourhood. Rest in next letter.

Your friend

7. You are Sudha Murthy. Write a letter to your friend telling her how and why you taught your grandmother to read. [CBSE 2010 (Term 1)]

Dear Mamta

Hope you are fine. I am writing this letter to you not to tell you about our common friends but about my student. Guess who? She is none other than my grandmother. It so happened that once I came back after attending a wedding she came to me and started crying. I was dumbstruck because I have always known her to be a tough lady who never cried even in most difficult situation. You know she cried at her helplessness of not being able

to read. This desperation led her to decide upon learning the alphabet even at the age of sixty two. I took up the challenge of teaching Kananada alphabet to my grandmother. She kept Dassera festival as a deadline. She worked with full devotion—reading, repeating writing and reciting and I gave her full support. After she was able to read '*Kashi Yatre*' by herself she came and touched my feet. When I protested, she said: "One is never too old to learn and a teacher is the most revered one, irrespective of age". Rest in next letter.

Sudha

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

(A) READING

Locate the lesson, "Portrait of a Lady" by Khushwant Singh. Read it aloud in the class.

- Discuss its merits/demerits.
- Point out its emotional content.

(B) WRITING

October 2 is celebrated as Senior Citizens Day. Design a poster creating awareness regarding the problems faced by the elderly in the modern world of today.

(C) SPEAKING/CONVERSATION SKILLS

- Discuss in pairs the exceptional qualities of your grandmother/grandfather.
- Compare
Give a speech in the class.

(D) PROJECT

The role of the grandparents is changing very fast due to the trend of nuclear families. Make a project on the role played by grandparents of the past, comparing with their role in the modern world of today.