Unit -1 (A)

How I Taught My Grandmother to Read

✍️ (Sudha Murty)

How I Taught My Grandmother to Read Summary

When the writer was about twelve, she lived in a village in north Karnataka with her grandparents. Those days, morning papers came in the afternoon and the weekly magazine came one day late. They would wait eagerly for the bus to arrive because all the magazines and newspapers used to come in that vehicle only. There was a writer named Triveni, who was known for her psychological and easy-to-read novels. She used to write on the daily struggles of the people at that time, which enabled the people to connect with her stories. One of her novels, Kashi Yatre, was about an old lady who gave up the money for her trip to Kashi to an orphan girl, so that the girl could marry the man she loved. The writer's grandmother too had a desire to go to Kashi but her desire was never fulfilled. So, she identified herself as the grandmother in that story. The writer's grandmother was illiterate, and so she asked the writer, who was a school-going girl, to read out the latest episode to her. During that time, she would forget all her work and listen with the greatest concentration. Later, she could repeat the entire text by heart. The grandmother was always eager to learn what would happen next. She would also discuss the episode with her friends. The writer was not mature enough to understand why her grandmother took so much interest in Kashi Yatre. One day, she went for a wedding with her cousins to the neighbouring village. There, she enjoyed herself thoroughly by enjoying the freedom given by the elders. Although she was supposed to stay there for just a few days, she spent a whole week there. When she came home, she saw that her grandmother, who was otherwise a brave woman, was in tears. The writer, who became worried, asked if everything was fine and if she was okay. The grandmother nodded but did not speak. The writer did not understand and forgot about it. That night, when the writer was sleeping, her grandmother came and sat next to her. Her affectionate hands touched the writer's forehead and the writer felt that she wanted to talk to her. She asked her what was wrong. The grandmother told her the sad incidents of her childhood, how she had lost her mother, her father was a busy man and had remarried, and at those times, education was not considered essential for girls. She got married at a very young age and had children. After that, she became busy keeping her children happy, because their happiness made her happy. She used to regret not going to school and so she made sure that her children and grandchildren studied well so that they would not feel any regret in the future. Even though the writer could not understand what her grandmother was talking about, she could see the sadness in her face. The worried-looking expression on her grandmother's face made her sad. She leaned forward and held her hand. She asked her if she could help her in any way. The grandmother said "yes" and explained that while the writer was gone to the neighbouring village, she was desperately trying to read the next episodes of Kashi Yatre. She felt helpless and said that even though she was well-off she did not feel independent. She went on to request the writer to teach her the Kannada alphabet. The deadline for it would be Saraswati Pooja day during Dassara. The writer, who could see the determination on her grandmother's face, childishly made fun of her desire to learn the Kannada alphabet at an old age. But the grandmother just smiled and said that for learning, there was no age bar. The next day onwards, the writer started her tuition.

Avva, the grandmother, proved to be a wonderful student. Finally the Dassara festival came. Her grandmother called the writer to the pooja place and made her sit down on a stool. They were going to exchange gifts with each other. The grandmother gave her a frock and then touched the writer's feet. The writer was taken aback because elders do not touch the feet of youngsters. Only the feet of God, elders and teachers were to be touched as it was a sign of respect. The writer felt like what the grandmother was doing was not correct. The grandmother explained that she was touching the feet of her teacher, not her granddaughter. The writer had taught her affectionately and had made her independent in such a short period of time. A teacher should be respected regardless of gender and age. The writer returned the namaskar and gave her the gift. It was the complete novel of Kashi Yatre. Her grandmother read the title and the publisher's name immediately, and the writer knew that her student had passed with flying colours.