

FICTION

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F.1 How I Taught My Grandmother To Read

by Sudha Murthy

1. **Have you ever helped your grandparent learn anything new about technology? List your experiences about the following :**

Task	Your Feelings/ experiences	Qualities grandparent displayed:
Teaching them how to use a smartphone		
Teaching them how to log in for virtual get-togethers		
Teaching them how to access online newspapers		
Teaching them how to browse internet to watch a show		

2. **Have you ever been on a trip to any place in India, where you did not know the language spoken locally? How did you feel? How did you manage to communicate?**

3. **Now read the text**

- When I was a girl of about twelve, I used to stay in a village in north Karnataka with my grandparents. Those days, the transport system was not very good, so we used to get the morning papers only in the afternoon. The weekly magazine used to come one day late. All of us would wait eagerly for the bus, which used to come with the papers, weekly magazines and the post.
- At that time, Triveni was a very popular writer in the Kannada language. She was a wonderful writer. Her style was easy to read and very convincing. Her stories usually dealt with complex psychological problems in the lives of ordinary people and were always very interesting. Unfortunately, for Kannada literature, she died very young. Even now, after forty years, people continue to appreciate her novels.

3. One of her novels, called Kashi Yatre, was appearing as a serial in the Kannada weekly Karmaveera then. It is the story of an old lady and her **ardent** desire to go to Kashi or Varanasi. Most Hindus believe that going to Kashi and worshipping Lord Vishweshwara is the ultimate punya. This old lady also believed in this, and her struggle to go there was described in that novel. In the story, there was also a young orphan girl who falls in love but there is no money for the wedding. In the end, the old lady gives away all her savings without going to Kashi. She says, 'The happiness of this orphan girl is more important than worshipping Lord Vishweshwara at Kashi.'
4. My grandmother, Krishtakka, never went to school. So, she could not read. Every Wednesday, the magazine would come and I would read the next episode of the story 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. My grandmother too never went to Kashi so she identified herself with the novel's protagonist. More than anybody else, she was the one most interested in knowing what happened next in the story and used to insist that I read the serial out to her.
5. After hearing what happened next in Kashi Yatre, she would join her friends at the temple courtyard, where we children would also gather to play hide and seek. She would discuss the latest episode with her friends. At that time, I never understood why there was so much of debate about the story.
6. Once I went for a wedding with my cousins to the neighbouring village. In those days, a wedding was a great event. We children enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. We would eat and play endlessly, **savouring** the freedom because all the elders were busy. I went for a couple of days but ended up staying there for a week.
7. When I came back to my village, I saw my grandmother in tears. I was surprised, for I had never seen her cry even in the most difficult of situations. What had happened? I was worried.
8. 'Avva, is everything fine? Are you alright?'
9. I used to call her Avva, which means mother in the Kannada spoken in north Karnataka.
10. She nodded but did not reply. I did not understand and forgot about it. In the night, after dinner, we were sleeping in the open terrace of the house. It was a summer night and there was a full moon. Avva came and sat next to me. Her affectionate hands touched my forehead. I realized she wanted to speak. I asked her, 'What is the matter?'
11. 'When I was a young girl I lost my mother. There was nobody to look after and guide me. My father was a busy man. He got married again. In those days,

- people never considered education essential for girls, so I never went to school. I got married very young and had children. I became very busy. Later I had grandchildren and always felt so much happiness in cooking and feeding all of you. At times I used to regret not going to school, so I made sure that my children and grandchildren studied well ...'
12. I could not understand why my sixty-two-year-old grandmother was telling me, a twelve-year-old, the story of her life in the middle of the night. One thing I knew, I loved her immensely and there had to be some reason why she was talking to me. I looked at her face. It was unhappy and her eyes were filled with tears. She was a good-looking lady who was almost always smiling. Even today, I cannot forget the worried expression on her face. I leaned forward and held her hand.
 13. 'Avva, don't cry. What is the matter? Can I help you in any way?'
 14. 'Yes, I need your help. You know when you were away, Karmaveera came as usual. I opened the magazine. I saw the picture that accompanies the story of Kashi Yatre and I could not understand anything that was written. Many times, I rubbed my hands over the pages wishing to understand what was written. But I knew it was not possible. If only I was educated enough... I waited eagerly for you to return. I felt you would come early and read for me. I even thought of going to the village and asking you to read for me. I could have asked somebody in this village but I was too embarrassed to do so. I felt so very dependent and helpless. We are well-off, but what use is money when I cannot be independent?'
 15. I did not know what to answer. Avva continued.
 16. 'I have decided I want to learn the Kannada alphabet from tomorrow onwards. I will work very hard. I will keep Saraswati Pooja day during Dassara as the deadline. That day I should be able to read a novel on my own. I want to be independent.'
 17. I saw the determination on her face. Yet I laughed at her.
 18. 'Avva, at this age of sixty-two you want to learn the alphabet? All your hair is grey, your hands are wrinkled, you wear spectacles and you have so much work in the kitchen...'
 19. Childishly I made fun of the old lady. But she just smiled.
 20. 'For a good cause if you are determined, you can overcome any obstacle. I will work harder than anybody but I will do it. For learning, there is no age bar.'
 21. The next day onwards, I started my tuition. Avva was a wonderful student. The amount of homework she did was amazing. She would read, repeat, write and recite. I was her only teacher and she was my first student. Little did I know then that one day I would become a teacher in Computer Science and teach hundreds of students.

22. The Dassara festival came as usual. Secretly, I bought *Kashi Yatre* which had been published as a novel by that time. My grandmother called me to the pooja place and made me sit down on a stool. She gifted me a frock. Then she did something unusual. She bent down and touched my feet. I was surprised and taken aback. Elders never touched the feet of youngsters. We have always touched the feet of God, elders and teachers. We considered that as a mark of respect. It is a great tradition but today the reverse had happened. It was not correct.
23. She said, "I am touching the feet of a teacher, not my granddaughter; a teacher who taught me so well, with so much of affection that I can read any novel confidently in such a short period. Now I am independent. It is my duty to respect a teacher. Is it not written in our **scriptures** that a teacher should be respected, irrespective of the gender and age?"
24. I did return *namaskara* to her by touching her feet and gave my gift to my first student. She opened it and read the title *Kashi Yatre* by Triveni and the publisher's name immediately .
25. I knew, then, that my student had passed with flying colours.



About the Author

Sudha Murty was born in 1950 in Shiggaon in North Karnataka. A prolific writer in Kannada, she has written seven novels, four technical books, three travelogues and two collections of short stories. Her previous English book 'Wise and Otherwise' has been translated into thirteen Indian languages. Her stories deal with common lives and human values such as charity, kindness and self-realisation. As a sensitive writer, she writes about the suffering of the people. The main characters in all her books are highly educated, non compromising, highly principled women.

4A. 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 how to read.
- (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 'Kashi Yatre'.
- (iv) women have a habit of discussing stories.
- (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.
- (d) Why did the grandmother touch her granddaughter's feet?
- (i) She did it as a mark of respect for 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.
- (e). *"Childishly I made fun of the old lady. But she just smiled."* The smile of the grandmother explains that she understood that her granddaughter
- (i) was determined to teach her.
- (ii) might be too immature to understand her pain.
- (iii) would ridicule her later.
- (iv) could be contemplating.
- (f). *"Those days, the transport system was not very good, so we used to get the morning papers only in the afternoon."* What can you infer from this?
- (i) The transport system, especially the bus service, was running at loss.
- (ii) The transport system, especially the bus service, was not fully functional in rural areas.
- (iii) The transport system, had stopped services in villages.
- (iv) The transport system failed to introduce the bus service in rural areas.

4B. Answer the questions based on the extracts by selecting the correct options.

- I. Many times, I rubbed my hands over the pages wishing to understand what was written. But I knew it was not possible. If only I was educated enough I waited eagerly for you to return. I felt you would come early and read for me. I could have asked somebody in this village but I was too embarrassed to do so. I felt so very dependent and helpless. We are well-off, but what use is money when I cannot be independent?
- i. What made the grandmother feel inadequate?
 - a. She was unable to read the story.
 - b. She was unable to stay attentive.
 - c. She was unable to buy the magazine.
 - d. She was unable to understand the story.
 - ii. Select the relevant option that best supports the context of the given extract:
 1. Grandmother was elated to get the magazine
 2. Grandmother was embarrassed to ask for help
 3. Grandmother eagerly waited for her granddaughter's arrival
 4. Grandmother loved gazing at the pictures from the story

a. only 1 and 2 b. only 2 and 3 c. only 3 and 4 d. only 1 and 4
 - iii. Select the option that tracks the progression of emotions experienced by the grandmother in the given extract.
 - a. reassured – inquisitive – thankful - uncertain
 - b. surprised – grateful – perplexed - excited
 - c. yearning - uncertain - dejected - helpless
 - d. perplexed – uncertain - panic-stricken – appreciative
- II. She said, "I am touching the feet of a teacher, not my granddaughter; a teacher who taught me so well, with so much of affection that I can read any novel confidently in such a short period. Now I am independent. It is my duty to respect a teacher. Is it not written in our scriptures that a teacher should be respected, irrespective of the gender and age"? I did return namaskara to her by touching her feet and gave my gift to my first student. She opened it and read the title Kashi Yatre by Triveni and the publisher's name immediately. I knew, then, that my student had passed with flying colours.
1. Choose the option that lists the most likely response to "... I am touching the feet of a teacher".
 - a. feel shy
 - b. get anxious

- c. feel overwhelmed
d. get upset
2. "A teacher should be respected irrespective of gender and age." Select the quote that suggests a reason for this sentiment.
- a. Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education.
b. A teacher aims to give equal attention to all the students.
c. A teacher elevates the mind and gives energy to the character.
d. Teaching is a profession that teaches all other professions.
3. Select the sentence that best brings out the meaning of 'confidently' as used in the extract.
- a. Some of the information was confidently misleading.
b. The report asserts confidently that the world economy will boost from the market collapse.
c. The present memoir is confidently a tribute to his ability and character.
d. The pandemic has confidently brought down the market.
4. Which of the given option stands closest in meaning to "flying colours"?
- a. risky
b. courageous
c. profitable
d. successful

5. **Answer the following questions briefly :**

- (a) Why did the grandmother depend on her granddaughter to know the story?
(b) Pick out two sentences showing that the grandmother was desperate to know what happened next in the story.
(c) Could the grandmother succeed in accomplishing her desire to read? How?
(d) Which of the following traits are relevant to the character of the narrator's grandmother?
- | | |
|-----------------|--------------|
| (i) determined | (ii) selfish |
| (iii) emotional | (iv) mean |

Give reasons for your choice.

- (e) "*Good fiction's job is to comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable.*" How does this apply to the grandmother after she had finished reading *Kashi Yatre*? Explain with a reason.

- (f) 'Kashi Yatre,' was the catalyst in the transformation of the grandmother. Support with an example.
- (g) What message does the story, "How I Taught My Grandmother" hold for the present generation and the elders?
- (h) Grandmother comes across a post online: 'Don't let age be a concern. Live your dream!' As grandmother, write a short paragraph expressing your heartfelt emotion on your achievement.

6. **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, grateful, respectful

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

LISTENING TASK

7. *The teacher will read out the story of a young girl about a special day given on p.no.137.*

(a) Based on your listening of the story complete the boxes given below.

(i)	What did the children do for the old people?	(ii)
(iii)		(iv)

(b) List any three feelings of the old people as expressed in this story

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

(c) Complete the following

- i) We can make our grandparents happy by _____.
- ii) We can avoid constructing more and more Old Age Homes by _____

WRITING TASK

8. **Imagine you are the grandmother. How would you feel if your granddaughter gave you the novel 'Kashi Yatre'? Write your feelings in your diary.**

To make your diary entry interesting, read the following information about what is a diary entry.

A diary entry is a purely personal piece of writing. The writer expresses his/her thoughts and feelings. Reactions to incidents are generally poured out in a diary. Hence expressions that are emotionally charged are used.

For example - When you are happy about something, you could start like this -

8th July 20xx, Wednesday 8 pm

Today I am very happy as.

.....

9. **While the country has made significant progress in improving adult literacy over the years, it continues to be home to 313 million illiterate people; 59 percent of them are women.**

The story 'How I Taught My Grandmother to Read' showcases a young girl helping her unlettered grandmother grow self-sufficient. The story is also a subtle eye-opener for the youth that if they realise their moral obligation, they can take the country to greater heights.

Pen down your thoughts in a blog on how the youth brigade of the nation can help alleviate Adult Illiteracy.

You may begin your blogpost like this:

India is considered one of the potential superpowers of the world but...

To create a blog, read the given information about what is a blog -

Blog is a short form for the word weblog and the two words are used interchangeably.

A blog is a regularly updated online **personal** journal or diary. It is a platform to express yourself to the world.

