Chapter 25: Bholi

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Exercise 25.1 — Read and Find Out 1 (Page 47)

Q1 Why is Bholi's father worried about her?

SOLUTION

Ramlal is worried about Bholi because she has two serious disadvantages that make it very hard to find her a husband. First, she is not good-looking: at two years old she suffered a severe attack of smallpox that left her entire body permanently disfigured with "deep black pock-marks" — only her eyes were saved.

Second, she is mentally backward. At ten months old she fell off a cot and damaged part of her brain, which made her "a backward child". She could not speak until she was five, and even then she stammered badly. The other children mocked her and she spoke very little.

The text sums up his worry plainly: "Bholi had neither good looks nor intelligence." With his other three daughters being "good-looking, healthy girls" for whom it was easy to find bridegrooms, Bholi stood apart as a daughter he feared would never be married.

Answer: Bholi's father is worried because she is physically disfigured by smallpox, mentally backward due to a childhood head injury, and stammers — making it very difficult to find her a husband.

Q2 For what unusual reasons is Bholi sent to school?

SOLUTION

The reasons for sending Bholi to school are unusual because they have nothing to do with educating her. When the Tehsildar sahib opens the new primary school for girls in the village, he tells Ramlal that as a revenue official he must "set an example to the villagers" and send his daughters to school.

Ramlal consults his wife, who is strongly against sending any daughter to school, fearing it will ruin their marriage prospects. But she hits upon a practical solution: send Bholi, the one daughter nobody is likely to marry anyway. Her reasoning is blunt — "As it is, there is little chance of her getting married, with her ugly face and lack of sense. Let the teachers at school worry about her."

So Bholi is sent to school not to benefit her, but to satisfy the Tehsildar's order without risking the marriage chances of the other daughters. It is essentially a way of disposing of a child considered worthless.

Answer: Bholi is sent to school not to educate her but because her father must obey the Tehsildar's order, and her mother decides that since Bholi has no marriage prospects anyway, the teachers can 'worry about her'.

Exercise 25.2 — Read and Find Out 2 (Page 49)

Q1 Does Bholi enjoy her first day at school?

SOLUTION

Bholi's first day at school is a mixture of fear and quiet happiness. At first she is terrified — when her father comes to take her, she shouts "N-n-n-n NO, no-no-no" and pulls her hand away, afraid she is being cast out like the old cow Lakshmi.

At school she is left alone with "fear-laden eyes" and cannot understand the teacher's words. When asked her name she can only stammer "Bh-Bho-Bho-" before breaking into tears, and she stays in her corner sobbing even after the bell rings.

Yet there are signs she is glad to be there. She is pleased to receive a clean dress and oil in her hair, and "began to believe that she was being taken to a place better than her home". She also hopes one of the many girls her age might become her friend. The colourful pictures on the wall fascinate her. So while the day is emotionally overwhelming, it also fills her with new hope.

Answer: Her first day is frightening at first — she cries and stays in her corner — but she is also glad to see girls her own age and fascinated by the colourful pictures, finding it better than her home.

Q2 Does she find her teacher different from the people at home?

SOLUTION

Yes, Bholi finds her teacher completely different from anyone she has known at home, and this difference moves her deeply.

The people at home — parents, siblings and neighbours — have always neglected or mocked her because of her stammer and disfigured face. She was given cast-off clothes, no one cared to mend or wash them, and she spoke very little because children "made fun of her and mimicked her".

Her teacher, by contrast, speaks to her in a voice "so soft and soothing" that "in all her life she had never been called like that". When Bholi struggles to say her name, the teacher does not laugh; instead she says "Well done, well done" and encourages her further. She pats Bholi affectionately and promises, "Put the fear out of your heart and you will be able to speak like everyone else." She gives her a colourful book and tells her she will one day be "more learned than anyone else in the village" and that "no one will ever be able to laugh at you."

This kindness is so unfamiliar that Bholi feels as if temple bells are ringing and trees have blossomed. For the first time she has hope.

Answer: Yes — unlike the people at home who neglected and mocked her, her teacher speaks to her with a soft, soothing voice, encourages her patiently, and fills her with hope for the future.

Exercise 25.3 — Read and Find Out 3 (Page 52)

Q1 Why do Bholi's parents accept Bishamber's marriage proposal?

SOLUTION

Bholi's parents accept Bishamber's proposal primarily because they fear she will never get another chance to be married, and they are relieved to find a groom who is not asking for any dowry.

Bishamber Nath is described as a "well-to-do grocer" with "a big shop, a house of his own and several thousand in the bank". The mother argues that this makes him a very good match financially.

Ramlal points out the negatives — Bishamber is almost the same age as himself, he limps, and he already has grown-up children from his first wife. But the mother dismisses all this, saying the most important thing is that he "does not know about her pock-marks and her lack of sense". Her reasoning is stark: "If we don't accept this proposal, she may remain unmarried all her life." Ramlal, though doubtful, mutters his agreement.

Answer: They accept the proposal because Bishamber is wealthy and asks no dowry, and they fear Bholi, with her pock-marked face, will never get another marriage offer.

Q2 Why does the marriage not take place?

SOLUTION

The marriage does not take place because Bholi refuses to go through with it after Bishamber behaves in a mean and greedy manner.

During the ceremony, when the veil is slipped back from Bholi's face, Bishamber sees her pock-marks and stops. He then demands five thousand rupees from Ramlal before he will proceed, saying "Five thousand, or we go back. Keep your daughter." Ramlal, in tears and humiliated, eventually counts out the money and places it at the bridegroom's feet.

Bishamber prepares to garland Bholi, but she strikes the garland into the sacred fire and throws away her veil. She tells her father in a clear, stammer-free voice to take back his money, announcing: "I am not going to marry this man." She calls Bishamber "a mean, greedy and contemptible coward" — a man she had been willing to accept for her family's honour but now finds utterly unworthy.

Answer: The marriage fails because Bishamber demands five thousand rupees on seeing Bholi's pock-marks, and Bholi, refusing to accept such a greedy and contemptible man, flings the garland into the fire and walks away.

Exercise 25.4 — Think about it (Page 54)

Q1 Bholi had many apprehensions about going to school. What made her feel that she was going to a better place than her home?

SOLUTION

Bholi is initially terrified of going to school, fearing it is some kind of banishment — the text says she remembered how their old cow Lakshmi had been "turned out of the house and sold", and she associated her own departure with the same fate.

What changes her mind are two small but significant acts of care that she had never experienced at home. Her father asks her mother to put her in "some decent clothes". As a result, for the first time she receives a clean dress — her sisters' old clothes had always been "passed on to her" unwashed and unmended. She is also bathed and oil is rubbed into her "dry and matted hair".

These simple acts of grooming — extraordinary for her because no one at home usually bothered — signal to Bholi that she is being taken somewhere important and perhaps caring. The text says: "Only then did she begin to believe that she was being taken to a place better than her home." Her instinct proved right, because at school she found the warmth and encouragement she had never received in the family.

Answer: Being given a clean dress, a bath, and oil in her hair — rare care she never received at home — made Bholi feel she was being taken somewhere better than home.

Q2 How did Bholi's teacher play an important role in changing the course of her life?

SOLUTION

Bholi's teacher transforms her life by doing what no one around her had ever done: treating her with genuine kindness, encouragement, and belief in her potential.

On the very first day, when the other girls laugh at Bholi's stammer, the teacher's voice is "so soft and soothing" that it touches Bholi's heart in a way she had never felt before. Instead of mocking her, the teacher encourages every halting syllable with "Well done, well done" and pats her affectionately. She promises Bholi that if she comes to school every day she will "speak without the slightest stammer" and become "more learned than anyone else in the village" — words that fill Bholi with "a new hope and a new life".

Over the years, as the village becomes a town and the primary school a high school, Bholi receives a full education. This education gives her the confidence, clarity of thought, and moral courage to act decisively at her own wedding ceremony. When Bishamber demands money and humiliates her family, it is her education and the values her teacher instilled that enable her to speak up clearly — without a stammer — and reject a greedy, contemptible man.

At the story's end, the teacher watches the scene with "the light of a deep satisfaction that an artist feels when contemplating the completion of her masterpiece" — confirming that Bholi's courage is the fruit of her teaching. Without the teacher's intervention, Bholi would likely have

remained a voiceless, marginalised figure all her life.

Answer: The teacher transformed Bholi by treating her with kindness and patient encouragement, giving her education and self-confidence, which ultimately enabled her to speak clearly and boldly reject a greedy, unworthy match.

Q3 Why did Bholi at first agree to an unequal match? Why did she later reject the marriage? What does this tell us about her?

SOLUTION

Bholi initially agrees to marry Bishamber — an old, lame man with grown children from his first wife — out of a sense of duty and concern for her family. She tells her father directly at the wedding: "For the sake of your izzat, I was willing to marry this lame old man." She is aware of her own social disadvantages and is prepared to sacrifice her personal happiness for her family's honour.

However, she rejects the marriage when Bishamber reveals his true character: he sees her pock-marks, halts the ceremony, and extorts five thousand rupees from her father by threatening to walk away. This act of public humiliation and greed crosses a line Bholi will not accept. She calls him "a mean, greedy and contemptible coward" — not lame or old, but morally unfit to be her husband.

Her initial acceptance shows selflessness and a willingness to compromise for her family. Her ultimate rejection shows moral courage, self-respect, and clear judgement that she did not possess before her education. Together, these choices reveal that Bholi has grown into a woman of deep integrity: she can accept hardship, but she will not accept dishonour or cruelty. Far from being the "dumb cow" others thought she was, she proves to be the most clear-sighted person at the ceremony.

Answer: She agreed initially out of duty to her family's honour; she rejected the match when Bishamber extorted money on seeing her pock-marks, showing she had grown into a woman of courage, self-respect, and moral clarity.

Q4 Bholi's real name is Sulekha. We are told this right at the beginning. But only in the last but one paragraph of the story is Bholi called Sulekha again. Why do you think she is called Sulekha at that point in the story?

SOLUTION

The name 'Bholi' means 'simpleton' — it is a nickname that encapsulates how her family and society have always seen her: as a backward, helpless, voiceless girl of no consequence. Throughout the story she is called Bholi, reflecting how others define her by her limitations.

The name 'Sulekha', by contrast, is her real, given name — a proper, dignified name. By using it in the penultimate paragraph, the narrator signals that the transformation is now complete. Sulekha speaks in "a voice that was calm and steady", without a trace of stammer, and

announces a confident life plan: she will serve her parents in their old age and teach at the same school where she learned so much.

The shift in name marks the moment Bholi fully reclaims her identity. She is no longer the simpleton the world dismissed. She has shed the label 'Bholi' through education, courage, and self-determination. Using 'Sulekha' at this precise moment is the author's way of saying that the real Sulekha — intelligent, articulate, and dignified — has finally emerged from behind the belittling nickname.

Answer: She is called Sulekha at that moment because her transformation is complete — by speaking calmly and asserting a life plan without any stammer, she has shed the 'simpleton' label and reclaimed her true, dignified identity.