

# **Bholi**

## **Introduction**

This story has been written by K.A. Abbas. It is about the transformation of a young timid girl into a bold young woman capable of taking her own decisions.

## **Summary**

From her very childhood, Sulekha alias Bholi was a little slow. She was the fourth daughter and seventh and youngest child of Numberdar Ramlal. When she was ten months old, she had fallen off the cot on her head. This had perhaps damaged some part of her brain and she was therefore a backward child.

Also when she was two years old, she had an attack of smallpox. Only her eyes were saved. Her entire body was permanently disfigured by deep black pockmarks. She could not speak until she was five and then also she stammered when she spoke. The other children made fun of her. Therefore, she spoke very little.

When Bholi was seven years old, all her elder sisters were married or their marriage had been fixed. Ramlal was now worried about Bholi and her marriage. The same year a primary school for girls was opened in their village. The village Tehsildar asked Ramlal to send his daughters to the school. To obey his orders, Bholi was sent to school. Her teacher took special interest in Bholi. She spoke to her softly and patted her with love, whenever she stammered.

She told her that when she becomes learned then no one will ever be able to laugh at her. People would listen to her and respect her. Bholi found new hope in her teacher's words and resolved to study hard.

The years passed. The village became a small town. The little primary school became a high school. A cinema had opened under a tin shed and a cotton ginning mill had also opened. The mail train had begun to stop at the village railway station.

One night, after dinner, Ramlal asked his wife if he should accept Bishamber's proposal for marriage with Bholi. Bishamber was a rich grocer from another village. But, he was as old as Ramlal. He also walked with a limp and the children from his first wife were quite grown up. Bholi's mother was not deterred by these facts. She only wanted to see Bholi married and therefore asked Ramlal to accept the proposal. Bholi was not asked and neither did she say anything. Bishamber Nath came with a big marriage party with pomp and show. Ramlal was overjoyed to see such pomp and splendour. Bholi's elder sisters were envious of her luck.

When the auspicious moment came, Bholi was led to the bride's place near the sacred fire. When the bridegroom was about to garland the bride, a woman slipped back the silken veil from the bride's face. Bishamber took a quick glance. He saw the pockmarks on the face of Bholi. He said if he was to marry her, her father must give him five thousand rupees. Ramlal pleaded with him and asked him to accept a smaller amount, but Bishamber was unmoved. At last, Ramlal gave him the money for his honour.

When Bishamber was about to garland the bride, the bride unveiled her face and her hand struck out like a streak of lightning and the garland was flung into the sacred fire.





She asked her father in a clear and loud voice to take back the money. She refused to marry the man, who was mean, greedy and contemptible. Other women wondered, how Bholi, a harmless dumb cow, had become so violent. Bishamber Nath and his party went back. Ramlal stood rooted to the ground. His head bowed low with grief and shame. He asked Bholi what will they do with her. Bholi told her father that she would serve them in old age. She would teach in the same school where she had learnt so much about life. Her teacher supported her in her decision.

## Message

This story conveys the message that little love and affection can play a huge role in transforming one's life. It also highlights the importance of education for the girls.

## Extract Based Questions ↘

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

- He said to Ramlal, "As a revenue official you are the representative of the government in the village and so you must set an example to the villagers. You must send your daughters to school."
  - Who is 'he'?
    - The Headmaster
    - The teacher
    - The Tehsildar
    - Bishamber
  - '..... you must set an example'. Elaborate.
  - He wanted Ramlal to:
    - support him
    - send his daughters to school
    - construct a school
    - become a teacher
  - Did Ramlal obey the Tehsildar?

### Answers

- (iii) The Tehsildar
  - The Tehsildar came to the village to inaugurate the school. He told Ramlal that as a representative of the government, he should send his daughters to the government, he should send his daughters to school to set an example to the villagers.
  - (ii) send his daughters to school
  - Yes, Ramlal obeyed the Tehsildar. He hadn't the courage to disobey the Tehsildar.
- She remembered how a few days ago their old cow, Lakshmi, had been turned out of the house and sold. "N-n-n-n NO, no-no-no," she shouted in terror and pulled her hand away from her father's grip.
    - Who is 'she' in the extract?
    - State whether the given statement is True or False. Her Father's name in Ramlal.
    - Why did she pull her hand away from her father's grip?
    - Complete the analogy with a word from the extract: sold : bought :: forgot : .....

### Answers

- Bholi is 'she' in the extract.
- True
- Bholi did not know what a school was like. When her father caught her by the hand, she thought that her

father was turning her out of the house as their old cow had been turned out of the house a few days ago. So, she pulled her hand away from her father's grip.

- remembered
- Then she began to cry and tears flowed from her eyes in a helpless flood. She kept her head down as she sat in her corner, not daring to look up at the girls who, she knew, were still laughing at her.
    - She was in:
 

(i) her house	(ii) the orchard
(iii) the class	(iv) the college
    - Why was she crying?
    - 'She' here refers to:
 

(i) Radha	(ii) Mangla
(iii) Sulekha	(iv) Bholi's mother
    - Who helped in changing her attitude towards life?

### Answers

- (iii) the class
- When Bholi reached school, she was very frightened. The teacher asked her name. She tried to speak but stammered. Then she began to cry and kept her head down as she knew that the girls were laughing at her.
- (iii) Sulekha
- Bholi's teacher helped in changing her attitude towards life.

## Short Answer Type Questions ↘

- Q 1. Why was Sulekha nicknamed Bholi? (CBSE 2016)**  
**Ans.** When Sulekha was ten months old, she had fallen off the cot on her head and perhaps it had damaged some part of her brain. That was why she remained a backward child and came to be known as Bholi, the simpleton.
- Q 2. Why did the other children make fun of Bholi?**  
**Ans.** Bholi could not speak till she was five. When at last she learnt to speak, she stammered. So, the children made fun of her because of her stammering.
- Q 3. Why was Bholi a neglected child in the family?**  
**Ans.** Bholi was a backward child. She had pockmarks all over her body and she stammered while speaking. She was not healthy and strong like her other siblings. Being the youngest in the family, the



other children made fun of her and mimicked her. As a result, she talked very little. Her parents also thought that she was neither pretty nor intelligent and it would be difficult to marry her off. So, everyone in the family thought that Bholi was of no use and hence neglected her.

**Q 4. What kind of mother was Ramlal's wife? (CBSE 2015)**

**Ans.** Ramlal's wife was an uneducated women with traditional values. She was not a good mother to her daughters. She thought that the earlier the daughters are married, the better it is. She was opposed to educating her daughters. She also did not look for aptness of the boy while marrying off her daughters.

**Q 5. Why did the Tehsildar come to Ramlal's village? What did he ask Ramlal to do?**

**Ans.** When Bholi was seven years old, a primary school for girls was opened in her village. The Tehsildar came to the village to inaugurate the school. He told Ramlal that as a representative of the government, he should send his daughters to school to set an example to the villagers.

**Q 6. For what unusual reasons is Bholi sent to school? (CBSE 2018)**

**Ans.** The Tehsildar came to Ramlal's village to perform the opening ceremony of a primary school for girls. He told Ramlal, Bholi's father, that as a government representative in the village, he must set an example to the villagers by sending his daughters to school. It was because of this that Bholi was sent to school.

**Q 7. Why did Bholi's mother not want to send Bholi to school?**

**Ans.** Bholi's mother did not want to send Bholi to school because she thought that no one would marry girls if they went to school. In those days, girl's education was not popular. It was thought that education spoils a girl.

**Q 8. Bholi had many apprehensions about going to school. What made her feel that she was going to a better place than her home?**

**Ans.** Bholi did not know what a school was like. She remembered how their old cow had been turned out of the house and sold. Therefore, she was frightened and was reluctant to go to school with her father thinking that she was also being sold. However, before she was send to school she was given a clean dress to wear. It was an unusual event for her. She was bathed and oil was rubbed into her dry hair. These things made her feel that she was going to a better place than her house.

**Q 9. What happened on Bholi's first day at school? Who changed her attitude towards life?**

**Ans.** When Bholi reached school, she was very frightened. The teacher asked her name. She tried to speak but stammered. Her teacher came to her and encouraged her to speak. She motivated her. She told her that when she becomes learned then nobody will laugh at her. People will listen to her and respect her. This changed Bholi's attitude towards life.

**Q 10. What filled Bholi, a dumb cow, with a new hope?**

(CBSE 2015)

**Ans.** Bholi's father got her admitted to a school on the advice of the Village Tehsildar. When she started going to school, she became a changed girl. Her teacher was a kind and loving lady. She encouraged Bholi to be fearless. She told her that when she becomes learned then nobody will laugh at her. People will listen to her and respect her. All this filled Bholi with a new hope.

**Q 11. Does Bholi find her teacher different from the people at home?**

**Ans.** All the family members despised and ignored Bholi. But her teacher spoke with Bholi in a soothing and affectionate voice. She encouraged her lovingly. Thus, Bholi found her teacher different from the people at home.

**Q 12. Bholi's teacher helped her overcome social barriers by encouraging and motivating her. How do you think you can contribute towards changing the social attitudes illustrated in this story?**

**Ans.** It is a well known fact that social evils can spoil the existence of the society. We can challenge these social evils and attitudes only by spreading the light of knowledge.

We can contribute towards changing the social attitudes illustrated in this story by educating the people because only education can broaden their mentality and ideas.

**Q 13. What were Ramlal and his wife's plans regarding Bholi's marriage?**

OR

**Why do Bholi's parents accept Bishamber's marriage proposal? (CBSE 2020, 15)**

**Ans.** Ramlal received a marriage proposal for Bholi from Bishamber Nath. Bishamber Nath was of the same age as Ramlal and also walked with a limp. The children from his first wife were quite grown up. However, he was rich. He had a big shop, his own house and was not asking for dowry. Bholi's mother thought that they were lucky to receive such a proposal. They feared that if they did not accept his proposal then Bholi may remain unmarried all her life. Their plans were that Bholi should marry Bishamber.

**Q 14. Why did Bholi at first agree to an unequal match? Why did she later reject the marriage? What does this tell us about her?**

**Ans.** Bholi at first agreed to an unequal match because she did not want to act against her parent's wishes. Bholi later rejected the marriage because the bridegroom was demanding a dowry of five thousand rupees and was insulting her father. This tells us that Bholi knew what was right and what was wrong for her. This also tells us that she loves her parents and cannot stand their being insulted.



**Q 15. Why did Bishamber's marriage with Bholi not take place?** (CBSE 2015)

**Ans.** Bholi was marrying Bishamber only to please her parents. However, when he insulted Bholi's father in front of everyone and asked for five thousand rupees to marry a girl with pockmarks on her face. Bholi becomes furious. She thought him to be a greedy, mean and hateful man. So, she refused to marry him.

**Q 16. Describe Ramlal's feelings, when the marriage did not take place.**

**Ans.** On hearing Bholi's refusal to marry Bishamber, Ramlal was rooted to the ground. His head was bowed low with grief and shame. He was also worried about Bholi's future and wondered who will marry her now.

**Q 17. How does education play a transformative role in Bholi's life?** (CBSE SQP 2023-24)

**Ans.** Education plays a transformative role in Bholi's life. It helps her gain confidence and self-esteem, enabling her to stand up for herself and challenge societal norms. It empowers her to break free from the chains of patriarchy and choose her own path. It also enables her to recognise and resist oppression and inequality, making her an agent of change in her community. Thus, through education, Bholi becomes an embodiment of the transformative power of knowledge and its ability to challenge and change societal norms.

## Long Answer Type Questions ↘

**Q 1. For what reasons was Bholi sent to school? How did Bholi's teacher play an important role in changing the course of her life?**

OR

**"Put the fear out of your heart and you will be able to speak like anyone else." These words of encouragement from the teacher highlight that change of social attitude and encouragement can help a child like Bholi to become confident and face the world bravely. Taking help from the lesson, 'Bholi' write how the social attitude towards Bholi made her an introvert. What should be done to help such children to face the world bravely?**

(CBSE 2015)

OR

**What social attitudes are presented in the story, 'Bholi'? How does Bholi's teacher help her overcome these barriers?**

**Ans.** When Bholi was seven-years-old, a primary school for girls was opened in her village. The Tehsildar came to the village to inaugurate the school. He told Ramlal that as a representative of the government, he should send his daughters to school to set an example to the villagers. When Ramlal discussed this matter with his wife, she refused. She thought that no one would marry their daughters if they were sent to school. But Ramlal did not had the courage to disobey the Tehsildar, so

they decided to send Bholi to school, as they thought that there was little chance of getting her married.

Bholi's teacher played an important role in changing Bholi's course of life. She was a kind woman. She encouraged Bholi to speak. She treated her with affection and told her to be fearless. She told her that when she will be educated, no one will be able to laugh at her. People would listen and respect her. Bholi followed her teacher's advice. She educated herself and when Bishamber Nath asks dowry from her father, she takes a stand and refuses to marry him. She says that she will spend her life teaching at the school and looking after her parents. Her teacher's teachings were instrumental in helping her to take this decision.

**Q 2. On the basis of your understanding of 'Bholi', sketch the character of Bholi.**

OR

**Destiny had been cruel to Bholi yet she made a place for herself in a conservative society. Discuss.**

(CBSE 2023)

**Ans.** Bholi's real name was Sulekha. But since her childhood, everyone used to call her Bholi, the simpleton. Destiny had been very cruel to her. She was a backward child. Her body was disfigured by pockmarks. She also used to stammer. She was neither wise nor beautiful. But, her education brought a change in her personality. She began to understand the difference between good and bad. Education made her a wise and mature girl. Yet, she never argued with her parents. She respected them and also agreed to marry Bishamber, a greedy, contemptible, old man, for their sake. It was only when Bishamber insulted her father that she refused to marry him. She at last spoke up and took a stand for herself. She then decided to dedicate her life to the service of her parents and to teaching. This shows her strong inner character, how she made a place for herself in a conservative society.

**Q 3. "Don't you worry, Pitaji! In your old age I will serve you and mother." Through this statement, the narrator wants to highlight the moral values Bholi was imbued with. What makes Bholi aware of her rights and how did she use them?**

OR

**It was education which made Bholi bold enough to say 'No' to Bishamber when he demanded five thousand rupees as dowry. Comment.** (CBSE 2019)

OR

**"Don't you worry, Pitaji! In your old age I will serve you and mother". Through this statement, the narrator wants to highlight the moral values Bholi was imbued with. Based on the reading of the lesson, what made Bholi aware of her rights and how did she use them?** (CBSE 2016)

OR

**Education is always a great asset in the life of a woman. How did Bholi, an educated girl, face the challenge posed by Bishamber's greed?** (CBSE 2017)



OR

School education turned Bholi from a dumb cow into a bold girl. How did she save her father from a huge expense and become his support in his old age? (CBSE 2017)

OR

Bholi was believed to be a 'dumb cow'. What turned her into a fearless, bold and confident girl? (CBSE 2023)

OR

'Education is considered the most important tool for empowering women in society. It plays an important role in social and cultural development.' Prove the above statements in the light of the story 'Bholi'. (CBSE 2023)

Ans. The values of education, marriage and general well-being of girls are focused in this chapter. Bholi is a symbol of these values. Earlier, she was believed to be a dumb cow. But, education made her a woman of substance. In fact, her teacher was behind her self-confidence. It was because of her that Bholi had the capacity of knowing what was right for her. Her father chooses Bishamber as her bridegroom. But when he demanded dowry, this dumb cow became a lioness. She knew her rights and refused to marry him. She even chose her future rightly. She told her parents that she would serve them in old age and will teach at school. Thus, we see that education turned her into a fearless, bold and confident girl and she became an inspiration for all the girls.

Education is always a great asset in the life of a woman. It can be considered the most important tool for empowering women in society. It plays an important role in their social and cultural development.

**Q 4. What changes do we find in the behaviour of Bholi in the end of the story? Explain.**

Ans. According to the story, we find great changes in the behaviour of Bholi in the end of the story. All these changes occur in Bholi after going to school and getting educated. In the beginning of the story, we find her very simple and naive. When she was only ten months old, she fell from the cot and a part of her brain was damaged. Due to this injury, she could not speak till she became five. She only stammered. Her mental capacity also could not develop. Everyone made fun of her. She also had pockmarks all over her body.

When she became seven years old, a school was opened in her village. Her father could not ignore the Tehsildar's order and he had to send Bholi to school. Now, changes started to take place in her behaviour. She stopped stammering. She could take right decisions about herself. At the time of her marriage, when Bishamber demanded five thousand rupees, she took a decision and refused to marry such a greedy man.