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Topic:- Madam Rides the Bus



ABOUT THE STORY

Introduction

"Madam Rides the Bus" is a sensitive story, narrated in a simple and chaste language, describing the long cherished first bus journey of an eight-year-old village girl. It also talks of her first experience of the dazzle and glittering display of merchandise in the shops in a nearby town. Towards the end, this girl is brought face to face with the mystery of death and she returns home sober and wiser.

SUMMARY

(1)

This sensitive story gives an account of an eight-year-old village girl's first bus journey to a town near her village. In the absence of any playmates, this girl, Valliammai or Valli, used to stand in the doorway of her house to see what all went on in the street. She experienced many unusual things as she watched the life outside her home.

The most exciting experience for her was the hourly appearance of a bus that shuttled between her village and the nearest town. She developed a desire for riding the bus. This wish became stronger and developed into an overwhelming desire. Whenever the bus passed her house, she looked longingly at the passengers and dreamt of having a bus ride as soon as possible. For months, she listened to the conversation between her neighbors and other people who frequently undertook the bus journey. She used to put various questions to them about their experiences and thus gathered sufficient and relevant information about how to ride a bus. She learnt about the approximate distance between the town and her village, the time that the journey between the village and town took, and the amount charged for one way fare. She also came to know, that if she took the one-o'clock bus, and returned without alighting, she could be back home by about two forty-five. So, she made detailed calculations and plans to fulfil her desire to ride a bus.

(II)

One fine spring day, Valli sneaked out of the house without her mother's knowledge and boarded the bus. The conductor volunteered to help her get into the bus but a confident Valli declined the offer. She showed him the bus fare that she was carrying, and got into the bus. The conductor was amused by her actions and manner of conversation. He jokingly called her "madam" and asked the other passengers in the bus to make way for her. Everybody was looking at her, so Valli felt shy and hurriedly walked to a vacant seat. The bus was new and its outside was painted white with green stripes on the sides. Valli looked curiously at everything. The outside view was, however, cut off because of a canvas blind covering the lower part of the window near Valli's seat. So, she stood up to have a good look at the outside world. She observed everything minutely. She was so engrossed that she immediately snubbed the gentleman who advised her to sit down lest she should hurt herself. Although, she was only eight years old, she did not like to be addressed as 'a child' or as 'madam'. She made this quite clear to the conductor and her co-passengers. Valli insisted upon standing on her seat but she sat down after a while for fear of losing it to other passengers who had started getting into the bus.



(III)

Valli enjoyed the sight of the trees and fields passing by the bus but what interested her the most (and sent her into peal so laughter) was a cow (with her tail high up in the air) running in the middle of the road in front of the bus. At last, the cow moved off the road and soon the bus reached the town after having crossed the railroad gate. Valli was thrilled to see the "bright looking shops" laden with a lot of merchandise. All this made the little girl very happy. Amidst all this excitement, the bus came to a standstill and all, except Valli, got off. When the conductor asked her why she was not getting down the bus, she told him that she would not alight but go back to her village by the same bus. She took out another thirty paisa from her pocket to pay the fare for her return journey.

(IV)

There weren't many passengers in the bus during the return journey as well. The conductor asked if her mother would worry about her and look for her when he gave her the return ticket. A defiant Valli responded that no one would be looking for her. Valli enjoyed her return journey too looking at the same sights that had amused her a great deal while riding to the town. However, she received a real shock when she saw that the cow that had run ahead of the bus during her onward journey was lying dead by the roadside. Sadness overcame her. The sight of the dead cow, that had looked so lovable and beautiful just a little while ago, left her shocked. This sad incident haunted her and dampened her excitement. She no longer wanted to look out of the window and remained stuck to her seat till the bus reached her village at three forty. After a brief chit chat with the conductor, Valli got down the bus.



When she reached home, she found one of her aunts, who was a chatterbox, talking to her mother. The two ladies were talking casually about matters of the outside. Valli's mother was telling that it was not possible for ladies like them to know everything that happened outside. She further added that even if they did come to know about such matters, they couldn't understand them fully. Valli responded to her mother's observation by saying, "Oh, yes". This surprised both her mother and her aunt. When her mother asked Valli to clarify, she just smiled mysteriously.

TITLE

"Madam Rides the Bus" is a befitting title for the story. Valli is just an eight-year-old girl, but she conducts herself like a woman. She turns down the conductor's offer to help her climb the bus and snubs everyone who tries to counsel her. Her woman-like behaviour earns her the title 'Madam' from the conductor. The core action of the story remains the bus ride undertaken by Valli, the Madam. Therefore, the title aptly puts spotlight on 'Madam' Valli and her experience of the bus ride.

THEME

The story is based on the theme that children are not as ignorant or as vulnerable as the adults think them to be. They are curious to explore the unknown areas of life around them and are keenly observant about things that catch their interest. Valli's attention is captured by the bus that used to pass through her street each hour. She gradually gathered information about its fare and the time it took to cover the distance from her village to the nearest town. Although a small girl of eight, Valli confidently undertook the bus ride all by herself. She remained in complete control of the situation throughout her new experience and reached back home safely.

Another *sub-theme of the story* is that life and death are integral to each other. Valli is delighted and amused to see the young cow run for its life right in front of the bus. However, she is sad and horrified to see the same cow's death on the road. The story thus conveys that life brings joy, and death makes us sad.

MESSAGE

Amongst all the banter and light-hearted situations, the story gives us the serious and philosophical message about the mystery of life and death. It tells that life is beautiful, while death is horrifying. The death of the cow makes the girl realize the transience of life and the inevitability of death. However, the story makes it clear that life never comes to a standstill. It goes on and on, endlessly and rhythmically.

HUMOUR

The entire story "Madam Rides the Bus" is interspersed with humours.

The title itself becomes amusing, when one comes to know that the "Madam" who rides the bus, is a child of a girl, just eight years old. Valli's using the English word "Proud! proud!" out of sheer jealousy and without understanding the real meaning of it, is amusing. The use of high-flown expressions like 'overwhelming desire', 'staring wistfully at the face, of passengers', 'kindle longings in the child's heart' also generate humour arising out of pedantic language. The little girl's calculation and planning of a simple bus journey of about two hours, also makes the reader smile.

An eight-year-old child behaving like a grown up lady too makes the situation humorous. The manner in which Valli rejects the help offered by the conductor to get in the bus and the conductor repeatedly addressing her as 'Madam' adds to the humour of the story. Again, the jocular conversation between Valli and the conductor makes one laugh. One also feels amused at the little child's flaunting the sixty paise, that she possesses, for the ticket and her behaving like an all important person.

And finally, Valli's smile towards the close of the story at the ignorance of her mother and her aunt about her exploit, amuses the reader. In short, the entire story makes a light hearted and enjoyable reading.

CHARACTERS

VALLI

She has many qualities that make her an amazing young person. For example, she is a happy child, although she does not have any playmates. She is very observant and keeps watching the scenes in the street outside her house. The same sense of observation is perceptible when she views the interior of the bus, the scene outside the window, the sight of the cow in panic, the scene of the town market, and the cow lying dead by the side of the road. Valli is essentially a dreamer who makes efforts to realize her dreams. She dreams of going on a bus journey to the nearest town and plans it intelligently. She saves money for it and executes her plan neatly without her mother getting even a hint of it.

Valli has a very confident and a nonchalant demeanour. Her speech exudes confidence that looks odd but fascinating for a girl of her age. She considers herself grown up, and speaks with the conductor and fellow passengers with panache. However, she easily gets annoyed and irritated if others poke their noses in her business and ask her too many questions. In particular, she chooses to give the old woman passenger a piece of her mind when the latter keeps probing her. At times, she appears to be rude, haughty and commanding, but at heart she is very sensitive and fun-loving.

She is easily affected by what goes on around her. If the sight of the cow running in panic with its tail up in the air can fill her with joy, she becomes very serious and sad on seeing the same cow dead by the roadside.

Valli plans cleverly and saves meticulously. She resists all sorts of temptations in order to save enough money for her bus ride. Her plan of the journey is flawless and her ability to take care of herself is exceptional. She has the courage to say 'no' whenever necessary. For example, she turns down the conductor's offer of a cold drink.

Overall, Valli is a delightful girl who is intelligent, mature and capable of looking after herself. She is cheerful and curious by nature and has her way with the people as well as her plans.

The Conductor

The unnamed bus conductor in the story is a man of cheerful disposition. Not many conductors are as helpful as he is. He is surprised to find an eight year Valli wanting to travel all by herself. He greets her cheerfully and helps her board the bus. He is truly impressed with her self-confidence and assertiveness. That is why he calls her a 'Madam'. On the way to the town, he tries his best to keep her in good humour and does not mind when she gets irritated and annoyed on account of the fun he has at her expense.

Once the bus reaches the town, he is surprised to find out that the girl does not want to get down to go around the town market and that she intends to return home by the same bus. Thinking that she must be tired and thirsty, he even offers to buy her a cold-drink, which she declines. On the way back, he readily answers all her questions about the dead cow. This shows that he loves children and is patient with them.

In short, the conductor is a good-natured, cheerful man who enjoys his work and who knows how to take care of his passengers, especially child-passengers. He is very nice to Valli and takes good care of her. He even invites her to come again for another bus ride.

EXTRACTS FOR COMPREHENSION

Read the following extracts and answer the questions that follow in one or two lines:-

- (1) Her favourite pastime was standing in the front doorway of her house, watching what was happening in the street outside.
 - a) Who is 'her' in this extract?
 - b) What was her favourite pastime?
 - c) Why did she stand in the doorway to watch the activities outside?
 - d) What did she usually get to watch?

- (2) There were no playmates of her own age on her street, and this was about all she had to do.
 - a) Who is referred to as 'she'?
 - b) How old is she?
 - c) What was 'all' that she had to do?
 - d) Did she enjoy doing it?

- (3) This wish became stronger and stronger, until it was an overwhelming desire. Valli would stare wistfully at the people who got on or off the bus when it stopped at the street corner. Their faces would kindle in her longings, dreams, and hopes.
- Which 'wish' is being talked about? Whose wish is it?
 - How did the wish continue to grow?
 - What did Valli do on seeing the bus stop at the street corner?
 - What would watching the faces of the passengers do to 'her'?
- (4) "Never mind," she said, "I can get on by myself. You don't have to help me."
- Who is the speaker of this line? Whom does he/she speak to?
 - Why do you think, the speaker was a bit curt and told, "You don't have to help me."?
 - What light does the speaker's statement throw on his/her personality?
 - What help had the listener offered to the speaker?
- (5) Suddenly she was startled by a voice. "Listen, child," said the voice, "you shouldn't stand like that. Sit down."
- Who is 'she' referred to in this excerpt?
 - Why was she startled?
 - Who told the child to sit down?
 - Why did the speaker ask the child to sit down?

*(Note:- I will give some more questions related to the chapter once I will complete this chapter via online classes. Till then I have given you notes of the chapter. So that you can also read and revise the chapter. Till then you all need to read the summary and on the basis of the chapter you need to solve these questions and do fair in your H.W. copy.)

Thank You