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LET'S LEARN TOGETHER

Class-X

English

Footprints without Feet

Chapter-8

Bholi



K. A. Abbas

Part - 1

Neha Rajvanshi

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BEFORE YOU READ

- From her very childhood Bholi was neglected at home. Why did her teacher take special interest in her? Did Bholi measure up to her teacher's expectations?

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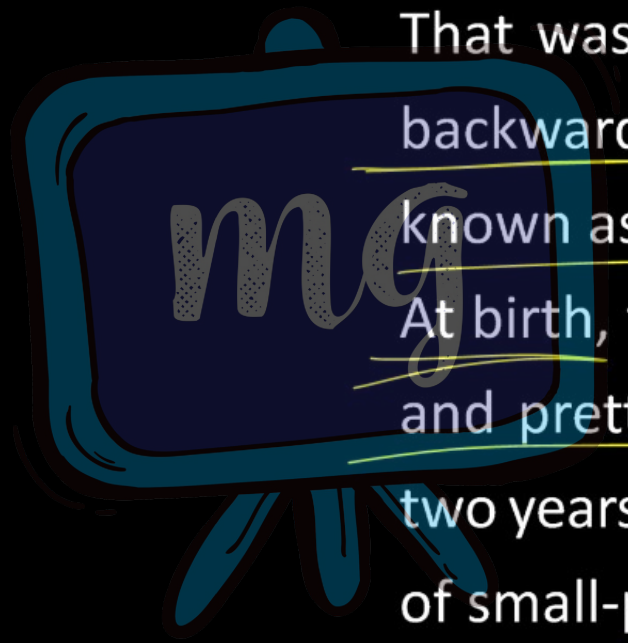
Simpleton : अनाड़ी / मुर्ख
Numberdar : राजस्व अधिकारी



HER name was Sulekha, but since her childhood everyone had been calling her Bholi, the simpleton. She was the fourth daughter of Numberdar Ramlal. When she was ten months old, she had fallen off the cot on her head and perhaps it had damaged some part of her brain.

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That was why she remained a backward child and came to be known as Bholi, the simpleton. At birth, the child was very fair and pretty. But when she was two years old, she had an attack of small-pox.

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disfigured : विरूपित हो जाना
stammered: हकलाना



Only the eyes were saved, but the entire body was permanently disfigured by deep black pockmarks. Little Sulekha could not speak till she was five, and when at last she learnt to speak, she stammered.

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mimicked : नकल करना
prosperous : समृद्ध

The other children often made fun of her and mimicked her. As a result, she talked very little. Ramlal had seven children — three sons and four daughters, and the youngest of them was Bholi. It was a prosperous farmer's household and there was plenty to eat and drink.

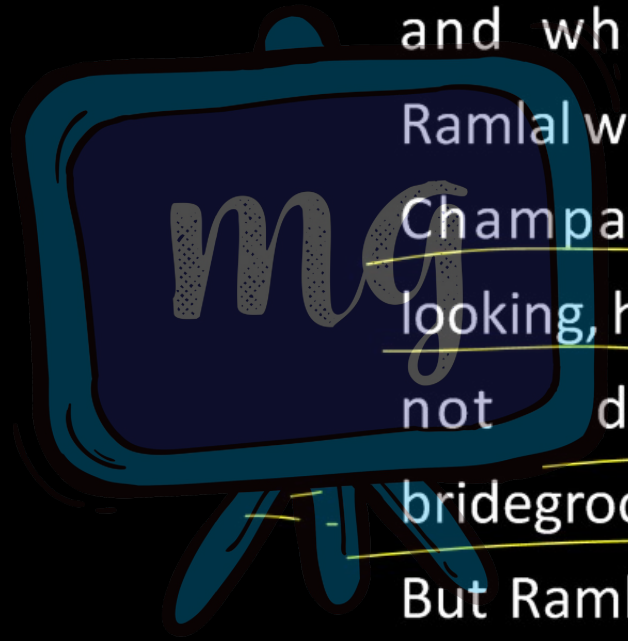
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All the children except Bholi were healthy and strong. The sons had been sent to the city to study in schools and later in colleges. Of the daughters, Radha, the eldest, had already been married. The second daughter Mangla's marriage had also been settled,

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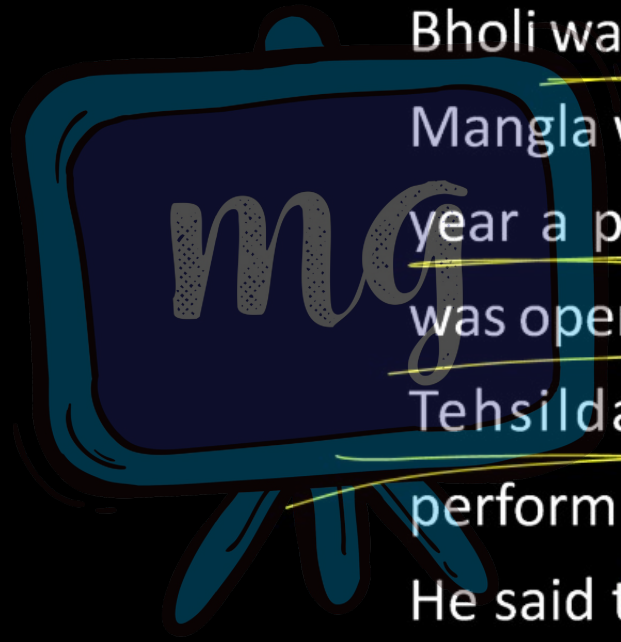


and when that was done, Ramlal would think of the third, Champa. They were good-looking, healthy girls, and it was not difficult to find bridegrooms for them.

But Ramlal was worried about Bholi. She had neither good looks nor intelligence.

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Bholi was seven years old when Mangla was married. The same year a primary school for girls was opened in their village. The Tehsildar sahib came to perform its opening ceremony. He said to Ramlal,

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consulted : विचार विमर्श करना

"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."

That night when Ramlal consulted his wife, she cried,

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"Are you crazy? If girls go to school, who will marry them?" But Ramlal had not the courage to disobey the Tehsildar. At last his wife said, "I will tell you what to do. Send Bholi to school. As it is, there is little chance of her getting married, with her ugly face and lack of sense.

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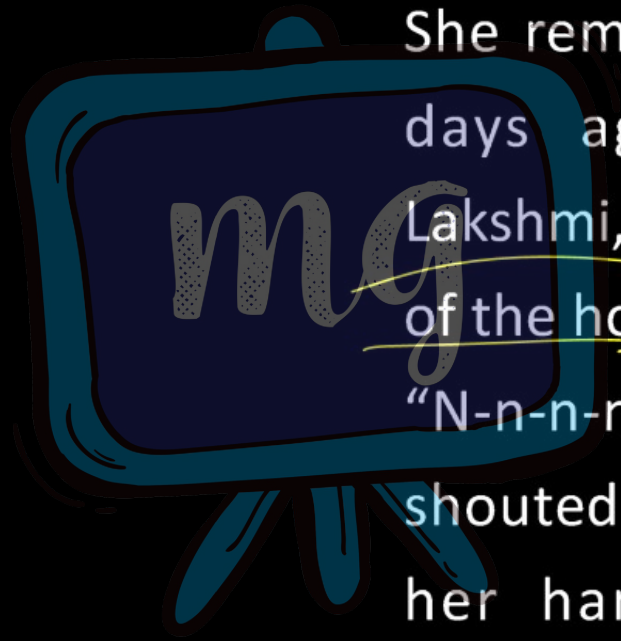
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Let the teachers at school worry about her."

The next day Ramlal caught Bholi by the hand and said, "Come with me. I will take you to school." Bholi was frightened. She did not know what a school was like.

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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.

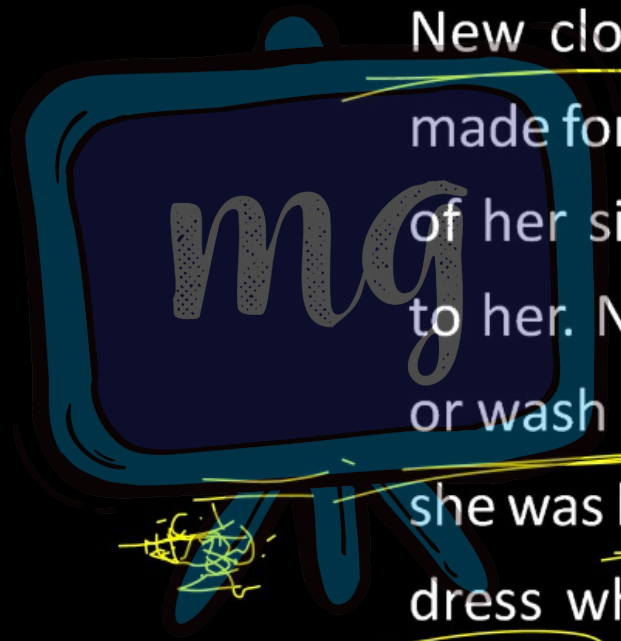
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decent : साफ सुथरे

"What's the matter with you, you fool?" shouted Ramlal. "I am only taking you to school." Then he told his wife, "Let her wear some decent clothes today, or else what will the teachers and the other schoolgirls think of us when they see her?"

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New clothes had never been made for Bholi. The old dresses of her sisters were passed on to her. No one cared to mend or wash her clothes. But today she was lucky to receive a clean dress which had shrunk after many washings and no longer fitted Champa.

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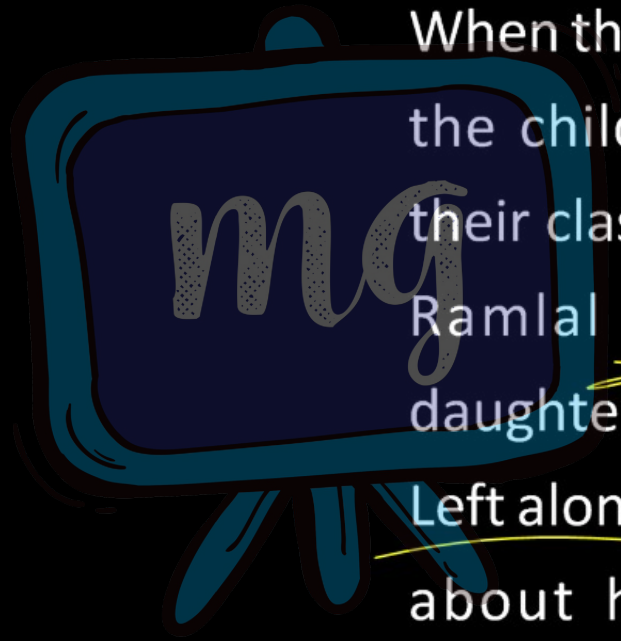
matted : उलझे हुए



She was even bathed and oil was rubbed into her dry and matted hair. Only then did she begin to believe that she was being taken to a place better than her home!

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When they reached the school, the children were already in their classrooms.

Ramlal handed over his daughter to the headmistress.

Left alone, the poor girl looked about her with fear-laden eyes.

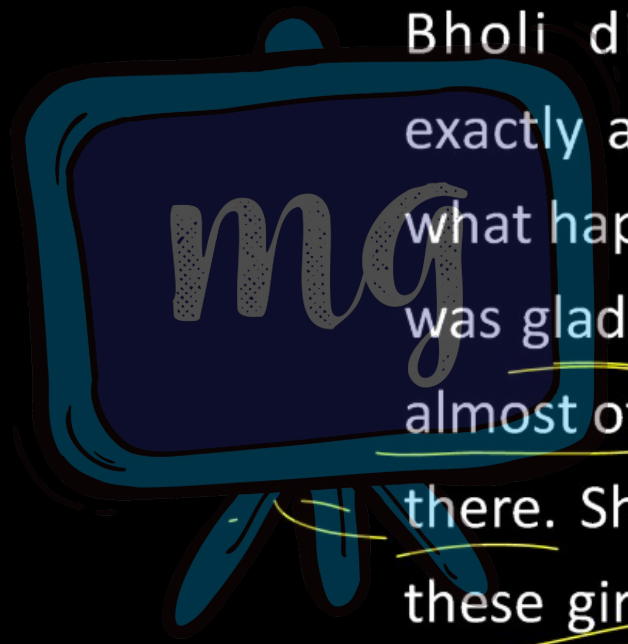
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There were several rooms, and in each room girls like her squatted on mats, reading from books or writing on slates. The headmistress asked Bholi to sit down in a corner in one of the classrooms.

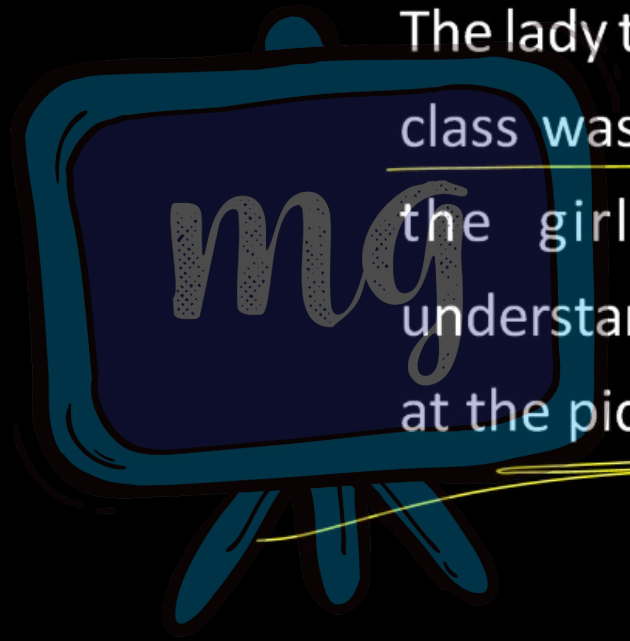
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Bholi did not know what exactly a school was like and what happened there, but she was glad to find so many girls almost of her own age present there. She hoped that one of these girls might become her friend.

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The lady teacher who was in the class was saying something to the girls but Bholi could understand nothing. She looked at the pictures on the wall.

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fascinated : आकर्षित करना
orchard : बाग



The colours fascinated her — the horse was brown just like the horse on which the Tehsildar had come to visit their village; the goat was black like the goat of their neighbour; the parrot was green like the parrots she had seen in the mango orchard;

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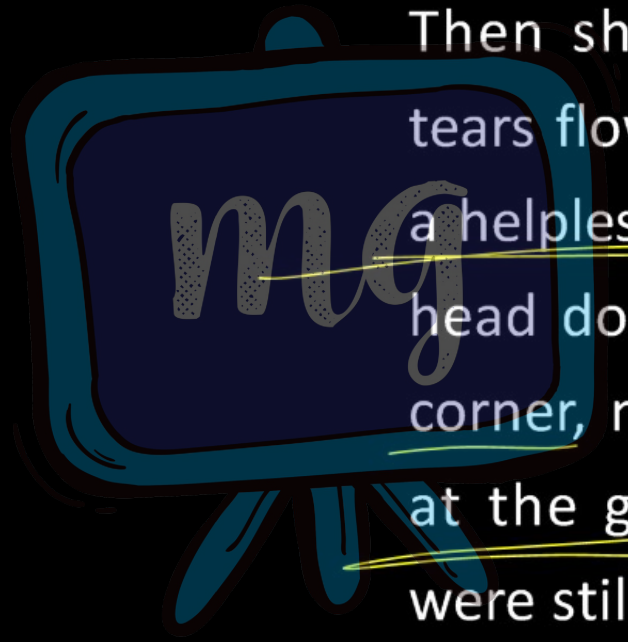
and the cow was just like their Lakshmi. And suddenly Bholi noticed that the teacher was standing by her side, smiling at her.

"What's your name, little one?"

"Bh-Bho-Bho-." She could stammer no further than that.

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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.

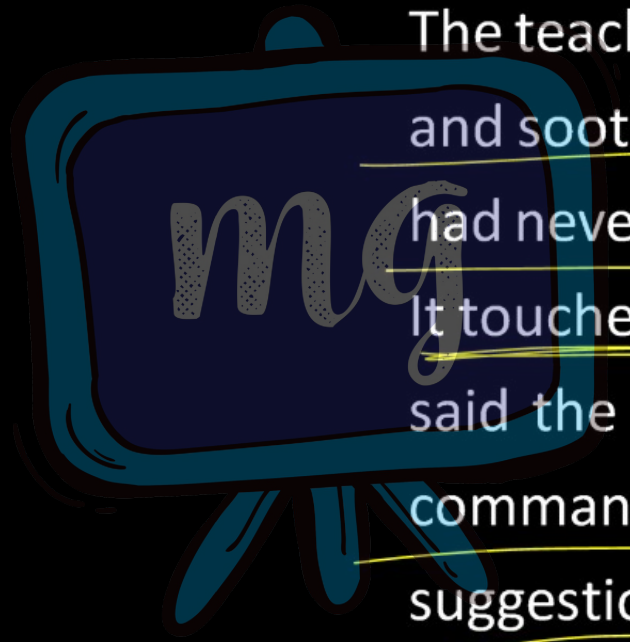
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scurried : तेजी से जाना

When the school bell rang, all the girls scurried out of the classroom, but Bholi dared not leave her corner. Her head still lowered, she kept on sobbing. "Bholi."

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The teacher's voice was so soft and soothing! In all her life she had never been called like that. It touched her heart. "Get up," said the teacher. It was not a command, but just a friendly suggestion. Bholi got up. "Now tell me your name."

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disgrace : अपमानित करना

Sweat broke out over her whole body. Would her stammering tongue again disgrace her?

For the sake of this kind woman, however, she decided to make an effort. She had such a soothing voice; she would not laugh at her.