Pigeons at Nightbreak

With old age, comes restrictions. As one ages passed the age of 28, they pass their physical peak. Due to this, people eventually experience some of the following: gain fat, lose their muscles, shrink, lose their vision, have a difficult time hearing, and lose their memory. In the story Pigeons at Daybreak by Anita Desai, published in the year 1978, the main character Mr. Basu experiences some of these afflictions. He is unable to read the newspaper due to his lack of eyesight, and he has a hard time breathing because of his worsening asthma. Mr. Basu experiences the occasional panic attack, but this is not something that he has just begin to do because of old age. Through the use of flashbacks in the story, it allows the readers to understand the difficulty of the change of perspective that Mr. Basu exhibits in the end of the story.

Desai begins the story with Mr. Basu having his wife read the newspaper to him. As previously stated, he can not read it himself due to his bad eyesight: a side effect of old age. All was going well until they came across an article about their town losing power for the night, “‘How will I sleep then?’ he gasped fearfully, ‘without a fan? In this heat?’ and already his diaphragm seemed to cave in his chest to rise and fall as he panted for breath” (Desai, 223). This quote highlights the sensitivity that Mr. Basu has to his surroundings. His inability to breath solely due to the fact that he wouldn’t be able to use his fan for the night proves how
emotionally unstable he is and how easily he gets upset. This allows the reader to get an insight on Mr. Basu’s personality and state at the beginning of the story.

Although he is this way now, the flashback allows the readers to see that he has always had this thing about him which makes him panic to an unreasonable extent over situations that aren’t as stressful as they are for Mr. Basu. As he is faced with the decision as to whether to sleep outside, Desai flashes back to the last time they slept outside, “Otima had urged her husband, night after night, to protest. When he did, they had almost killed him” (Desai 225). The author emphasizes how fragile Mr. Basu is when faced with a stressful situation. This quotation proves how Mr. Basu has never been the type of guy to stand up for what he believes in, being that it took him many nights and urges from his wife to say something. This flashback gives the reader the same nervous perspective of Mr. Basu being a stressed, nervous character who is very easily uncomfortable. Also, the author later on hints that Mr. Basu isn’t very strong when it is stated that, “they would have had they managed to cross over to the Basus’ terrace which they were physically prevented from doing by their sons and daughters” (Desai 226). This quote emphasizes that Mr. Basu is not the fighting type. Both quotes point towards Mr. Basu being an introverted person who likes to keep to himself and does not like any sort of disagreement with others, and has been this way in the past as well.

Now that it is clear how Mr. Basu has always been like that, the change of heart at the end of the story has a greater impact for the reader. After complaining throughout the entirety of the story about every little thing, Mr. Basu states, “‘Leave me alone’ he said again in that still voice, ‘It is cool now’” (Desai 228). This type of attitude is completely out of character, which proves a change in perspective for Mr. Basu. Through the flashbacks, the reader now knows
how difficult it was to change the way he viewed the world because he has been the same stressed out guy since he was younger. Due to the difficulty of this change, there must have been a very good reason for Mr. Basu to inhibit this change.

The way that the flashbacks emphasize how difficult it was for Mr. Basu to change his perspective on life proves how powerful and life changing nature could be. The beautiful scenery described at the end of the story hints at the importance of nature. Because of this, I believe that the author’s intentions were to ensure the reader fully understood both the importance of retaining Earth’s beauty for all to see and the influence that it has on the lives of many.