

By Dhumketu

SUMMARY

Coachman Ali is very old and sick and has been regularly visiting the post office for the last five years. Unfavourable weather and failing health don't deter him. He religiously visits the post office every day in the hope of receiving a letter from his daughter Miriam, his only child, who had got married to a soldier and left him. Getting a letter from Miriam becomes the most important mission for him and every day Ali is the first one to arrive and the last one to leave, but no letter ever comes for him. Everyday he goes back dejected and empty-handed. Everyone at the post office considers him mad and derives pleasure in tormenting him.

Coachman Ali had been a famous *shikari* and a crackshot in his yester-years. When Miriam left him and did not respond, he realised the pain of suffering and separation. So he gave up hunting altogether.

One day Ali is in very bad physical condition and reaches the post office with great effort. This makes him impatient and an argument takes place with the postmaster. The postmaster has his own preoccupations, he becomes irritated and calls Ali 'a pest'. Ali is humiliated, crestfallen but not bereft of hope. While leaving, Ali gives five guineas to Laxmi Das, the clerk, and extracts a promise from him that he will deliver Miriam's letter to his grave. Ali's prediction proves true and he is not seen for some time.

By a strange quirk of fate, the postmaster finds himself in a similar situation. His daughter is ill in another town and he has no information of her condition. He is eagerly waiting for his daughter's letter, when he chances upon Miriam's letter for her father. Since the postman is also suffering the pain of separation, he understands the value of a child's letter for the father. Next morning he delivers the letter personally to Ali. He is later shocked to discover that Ali has been dead for the past three months. Laxmi Das, the clerk, recounts his last meeting with Ali and their suspicions are further confirmed to see Miriam's letter lying near the door. To compensate for their bad treatment, both the postmaster and Laxmi Das visit Ali's grave and place the letter on it.

This proves to be a very traumatic experience for the postmaster. He realises that letters are not just envelopes and postcards, but they have great human worth. The newly awakened father's heart curses him for

maltreating Ali. His only fate is now to wait for his daughter's letter and spend another night in restless anxiety.

सारांश

कोचवान अली वृद्ध और रोग-ग्रस्त हैं, परन्तु पिछले पाँच वर्षों से वह लगातार डाकघर जा रहे हैं। बुरे से बुरा मौसम, उनकी गिरती हुई सेहत भी उनको रोक नहीं सकती है। वह प्रतिदिन डाकघर इस आशा से जाते हैं कि एक न एक दिन उन्हें अपनी इकलौती पुत्री, मरियम का पत्र अवश्य मिलेगा। मरियम, एक सैनिक से विवाह करने के बाद, अपने पिता को छोड़ कर चली गई थी।

अली के जीवन का बस एक ही ध्येय था – अपनी पुत्री का पत्र पाना। वह रोज़ सबसे पहले डाकघर पहुँचते हैं और सबसे बाद में जाते हैं, पर अब तक उनके नाम का कोई पत्र नहीं आया। प्रतिदिन वह खाली हाथ, निराश होकर लौटते हैं। डाकघर में सब अली को पागल समझते हैं और उन्हें तड़पाने में खुश होते हैं।

अपने समय में कोचवान अली एक सुप्रसिद्ध शिकारी थे और एक अत्यन्त चतुर बन्दूक चालक। जब मरियम उन्हें छोड़कर चली गयी और कभी भी उसके पत्रों का उत्तर नहीं दिया तब अली को जुदाई और उसकी वेदना का आभास हुआ। तब उन्होंने शिकार करना बिल्कुल छोड़ दिया।

एक दिन, जब अली का स्वास्थ्य बहुत खराब था, वह डाकघर बड़ी मुश्किल से पहुँचे। बुरे स्वास्थ्य के कारण वह अधीर हो गये और पोस्टमास्टर से झगड़ा करने लगे। पोस्टमास्टर की अपनी निजी परेशानियाँ थी और वह झुँझलाकर अली को "चिढ़ पैदा करने वाला" कह बैठे। अली हतोत्साह और अपमानित तो हुए पर फिर भी उन्होंने आशा का साथ न छोड़ा। जाते समय वह सोने के पाँच सिक्के लक्ष्मीदास नामक एक क्लर्क को दे गये और उनसे यह वचन भी ले लिया कि अगर वह मर गये तो मरियम का पत्र उनकी कब्र तक पहुँचा दिया जाये। अली की यह भविष्यवाणी सत्य निकली क्योंकि बहुत दिनों तक अली दिखाई नहीं दिये।

भाग्य की विडम्बना देखिये। पोस्टमास्टर साहब भी अली के ही जैसी समस्या का सामना कर रहे हैं। उनकी पुत्री बीमार है, दूसरे शहर में है पर उसकी कोई खैर-खबर उन्हें मालूम नहीं है। वह भी उत्सुकता से अपनी पुत्री के पत्र का इंतज़ार कर रहे हैं। अचानक एक दिन उनकी नज़र जब मरियम के पत्र पर पड़ी तो उन्हें उस पत्र का महत्त्व समझ में आया। वह स्वयं अपनी बेटी की जुदाई का दुख सह रहे हैं। वह दूसरे दिन खुद अली को पत्र देने गये। वहाँ जाकर वह चकित रह गये जब उन्हें यह ज्ञात हुआ कि अली का निधन हुए तीन मास बीत चुके हैं। उन्होंने जब अपने क्लर्क लक्ष्मीदास को यह बताया, तब उसने अली के

साथ अपनी अन्तिम मुलाकात के बारे में बताया। अपने दुर्व्यवहार से लज्जित होकर वे दोनों अली की कब्र पर गये और वह पत्र उस पर रख दिया।

यह अनुभव पोस्टमास्टर के लिए एक अप्रिय, मानसिक आघात और वेदना देने वाला था। उनको अब यह सत्य स्पष्ट रूप से मालूम हुआ कि पत्र केवल लिफाफे नहीं है बल्कि उनका कुछ मानवीय मूल्य भी होता है। उनका पुत्री-प्रेम की भावना से भरा हुआ हृदय उन्हें अली के प्रति दुर्व्यवहार के लिए धिक्कारता है। अब उन्हें भी अपनी पुत्री के पत्र का इंतजार करना पड़ेगा तथा एक और रात बेचैनी और चिंता में बितानी पड़ेगी।

WORD-MEANINGS

Tattered : torn • **Plodded** : walking with difficulty
 • **Staff** : stick • **Squatted** : sat down • **Scrub** : bush
 • **Bereft** : without • **Serenity** : calmness • **Boundless** : limitless
 • **Glimmer** : shine • **Relic** : object survived in its primitive form
 • **Brimming** : full of • **Recital** : narration • **Worth** : value • **Reproaching** : blaming
 • **Remorse** : regret • **Precincts** : space within a boundary
 • **Lunacy** : madness • **Crackshot** : skilled in shooting.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

TEXTBOOK QUESTIONS (SOLVED)

4. Answer the following questions by ticking the correct options :

- (a) Ali's walking to the post office daily even in biting cold weather shows his _____.
- (i) courage (ii) optimism
 (iii) foolishness (iv) strength of will
- (b) The post office is referred to as Ali's "place of pilgrimage" as he _____.
- (i) visited it daily
 (ii) came there to pray for a letter from his daughter
 (iii) went there with faith and hope
 (iv) believed God would bless him if he went there
- (c) The postmaster's rudeness to Ali reveals his _____.
- (i) lack of empathy
 (ii) preoccupation with his work
 (iii) preconceived notions
 (iv) insensitivity
- (d) Ali did not come to the post office for several days as _____.
- (i) he had given up hope
 (ii) he was upset by the postmaster's rebuke
 (iii) he was unwell and not able to walk to the Post Office
 (iv) he was busy hunting
- (e) "Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait." The postmaster was waiting for _____.
- (i) a letter from Miriam

- (ii) a letter from his own daughter
 (iii) a letter from Ali
 (iv) Ali to deliver Miriam's letter to him.

Answers : (a) (ii) (b) (iii) (c) (ii)
 (d) (ii) (e) (ii)

5. Answer the following questions briefly.

(a) *Who was Ali? Where did he go daily?*

Ans. Ali had been a skilled shikari, renowned for his expertise in shooting. He had given up that profession and now he was old and sick. Daily he made his trek to the post office to enquire for a letter, which he was expecting from his daughter Miriam, who had got married and gone away.

(b) *Ali displays qualities of love and patience. "Give evidence from the story to support the statement."*

[C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans. Ali's love for his daughter is unparalleled. He gave up hunting when he became a father and amidst bitter weather and sickness went to post-office daily to enquire about his daughter. He displays great patience for the touching taunts of the employees there, and even when he is on the verge of death, he instructs one clerk to keep Miriam's letter on his grave. His patience is limitless, so is his love for his daughter.

(c) *How do you know Ali was a familiar face at the post office?*

Ans. Ali had become a fixture at the post-office. All the clerks and the postmaster got used to him and called him a mad man. For the last five years he had been coming daily to the post office without fail.

(d) *Why did Ali give up hunting?*

Ans. His only daughter Miriam got married and left

him. Ali then understood the real meaning of love and separation. So he gave up hunting.

(e) *What impression do you form of the postmaster after reading the story 'The Letter'?*

Ans. The postmaster was also emotional and compassionate. He truly needed some situation to bring out his human qualities. When he was worried for his daughter, he realised Ali's misery. Basically he was charitable and kind, he regretted his behaviour and went with Laxmi Das to lay Miriam's letter on Ali's grave. He understood the human worth of letters.

(f) *The postmaster says to Ali, "What a pest you are brother." Do you agree? Give reason.*

[C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans. The postmaster got irritated with Ali's perservance and tenacity. Mindlessly he called Ali a pest. He was unjustified because till then he had not been exposed to any separation of a child from his parents. He appeared to be cruel and inhuman. As he hadn't undergone the emotional pangs of a grieving father so he failed to gauge Ali's misery.

(g) *Ali came out very slowly ... eyes filled with helplessness. Why were Ali's eyes filled with helplessness? What had exhausted was patience but not his worth?*

Ans. Ali had waited endlessly for his daughter's letter, he felt helpless. The employees at the post-office made fun of him but he couldn't resist the temptation of seeing Miriam's letter. When he was insulted by the post master, who called him a 'pest', Ali's patience was exhausted but his unflinching hope told him that a letter would surely arrive.

(h) *'Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait.' Who is tortured by doubt and remorse? Why? What is he waiting for?*

Ans. The postmaster's heart is beating with anxiety to hear from his own daughter. The newly-awakened father's heart was blaming him for having failed to understand Ali's anxiety. He was tortured by doubt and remorse. For the first time he had understood what a father feels without hearing any news from his daughter. His heart was brimming with sympathy for Ali because his emotional condition was similar to that of Ali.

7. Complete the table by explaining the following phrases/sentences in your own words :

Phrases	Meanings
Happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close	Happy memories prove to be life-giving to a person who is on the verge of death.
The sound helped him along his lonely way	The sounds cheered him up as he walked alone.
The cold used sleep to extend its sway over all things even as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles	The bitter cold weather enveloped everyone around just as a false friend hides his intention behind wide smiles.
When the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways and suddenly took a new turn	When his life was ending, surprisingly he left his old habits and changed his way of living.
The whole universe is build up through love and that the grief of separation is inescapable	The foundation of the entire world is love and when there is separation then grief is unavoidable.
The postmaster, a man with a face as sad and as inexpressive as a pumpkin, would be seen sitting on his chair inside	The postmaster looked like a pumpkin with a sad and inexpressive face, sitting on his chair.
And so the clerk, like a worshipper of Vishnu, repeated his customary thousand names	The clerk like a worshipper of Vishnu called out the names of thousand of people to whom the letters are to be distributed.
The haughty temper of the official had quite left him in his sorrow and anxiety, and had laid bare his human heart	The postmaster was no more conceited and rude. His own grief and concern for his daughter had made him aware of the deep bonds between parents and children

SOME IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. What is the theme of the lesson 'The letter' written by Dhumaketu?

Ans : Love is the foundation of the entire universe and the desire to love and be loved is intrinsic in the nature of Man. The relationship of a parent and child forms the core-centre of the universe and no other relationship can equal it in intensity. Grief and separation from a child becomes very poignant and unbearable for a father and eternal wait for a child's letter can prove to be real torture. Coachman Ali is a symbol of endless patience, perseverance and his unshaken faith in Miriam's letter doesn't end with his death. Moreover, a grieving father can only understand the trauma and suffering of another father. Pain and suffering bring people together even. In the last five years he never received any letter. So the post office people regarded him to be a mad man. Moreover, Ali appeared to be lost in his own world, without being bothered by any sarcastic remark or being deterred by unfavourable weather.

2. "Ali's wait for his daughter's letter extends beyond his grave." Bring out the truth of this

statement by referring to the lesson 'The Letter.'

Ans : A parent's entire life revolves around his child. A father is totally oblivious of his discomfort of suffering in looking after his child. A child forms the core-centre of its parents' universe. Pain of separation from a child is intolerable for a father. Coachman Ali's life had changed dramatically after his daughter Miriam left him, after getting married to a soldier. Ali was desperate to know of her welfare but for five long years he never received a reply. Sickness, ridicule, sarcasm, nothing seemed to affect him. Ali relentlessly visited the post office before dawn and came back only after night. His diehard optimism and unshaking faith in Miriam's letter remained steadfast. The death of his physical body couldn't stop this eternal quest. He promptly appears to receive Miriam's letter, at the stroke of five. An unearthly light and tears on his face, made the postmaster shrink back in fear and amazement. Ali ceased to exist in his physical body but the yearnings of his indomitable spirit is satisfied. His infinite patience wins in the end, even though he is dead.

REFERENCE TO CONTEXT – MCQs

Read the following passages and write the most appropriate option from the ones provided to you.

1. "It's a mad man, sir, who worries by calling everyday for letters that never come."

- (i) Identify the speaker
(a) the postmaster (b) The postman
(c) Ali (d) the clerk
- (ii) Who is referred to as the mad man? What is the context?
(a) The staff because they keep gossiping whole day
(b) Laxmi Das because he never mentioned Ali
(c) Ali is mad because he went to post office everyday to collect his daughter's letter
(d) The postmaster because he imagined that Ali was alive.
- (iii) What does the above remark reflect about the character of that person?
(a) hardworking
(b) persevering
(c) kind and compassionate
(d) polite and humble

2. "But he is a bit touched, sir. In the old days he committed many sins and maybe he shed some blood within sacred precincts and is paying for it now," the postman added in support of his answer.

- (i) What crime has the above-mentioned person committed?
(a) He has cheated people of their money
(b) He has killed many birds and animals
(c) He had beaten many people in great cruelty
(d) He was a liar
- (ii) How is the person paying for his crimes?
(a) He is suffering greatly due to diseases
(b) He is isolated from his friends
(c) His wife has died
(d) No letter has come from his daughter so he is mentally very upset
- (iii) What does the above remark reflect about the character of the speaker?
(a) fun-loving and jolly
(b) sadistic
(c) concerned and caring
(d) cruel

Answers : (i) (d) (ii) (c) (iii) (b)

Answers : (i) (b) (ii) (d) (iii) (d)

3. "Here, look at this!" and Ali produced an old tin box and emptied five golden guineas into the surprised clerk's hands. "Don't look so startled," he continued. "They will be useful to you and they can never be to me. But will you do one thing?"

- (i) The money cannot be of any use to Ali because
 (a) He is already too old and has no other desires
 (b) He is a miser
 (c) He has no near relative
 (d) He is charitable
- (ii) The purpose for which Ali gave money is
 (a) to show his kindness
 (b) to get Miriam's letter to him
 (c) given as a tip
 (d) to impress the staff with his compassion
- (iii) The above remark shows that the speaker is
 (a) indifferent (b) optimistic
 (c) compassionate (d) reasonable

Answers : (i) (a) (ii) (b) (iii) (b)

4. The postmaster didn't receive his own letter all that day. He worried all night and getting up at three, went to sit in the office. "When Ali comes at 4 o'clock," he mused, "I will give him the letter myself."

- (i) Why is the postmaster waiting for Ali when he had turned him away earlier?
 (a) He wants to personally deliver Miriam's letter to Ali
 (b) He has no other work to do
 (c) He repents his bad behaviour
 (d) He is ashamed of his behaviour towards Ali
- (ii) Which letter is the postmaster waiting for?
 (a) Miriam's (b) Laxmi Das's
 (c) his own daughter's (d) his wife's
- (iii) What is his ultimate realisation?
 (a) letters must be delivered fast
 (b) one must not scold anyone
 (c) separation from a child is unbearable
 (d) one must control one's anger

Answers : (i) (d) (ii) (c) (iii) (c)

5. Laxmi Das had heard the postmaster's words as he came towards the office from another quarter. "Who was that, sir? Old Ali?" But the postmaster took no notice of him.

- (i) Describe the context of the above statements.
 (a) Arrival of the letter of postmaster's daughter
 (b) Arrival of Miriam's letter
 (c) Postmaster talking to Ali
 (d) Laxmi Das's presence
- (ii) The postmaster took no notice of Laxmi Das because
 (a) he was depressed
 (b) he was lost in the thoughts of his daughter
 (c) he had seen Ali looking strange and unearthly
 (d) he was disturbed by Laxmi Das's loud voice
- (iii) What was the strange news that Laxmi Das gave?
 (a) That a letter had arrived from the postmaster's daughter
 (b) That the staff at post office was non-cooperative
 (c) That Ali had died three months ago.
 (d) That Ali had given him money

Answers : (i) (c) (ii) (c) (iii) (c)

6. "That evening you could have seen Laxmi Das and the postmaster walking with slow steps to Ali's grave. They laid the letter on it and turned back."

- (i) Where were Laxmi Das and the postmaster going?
 (a) Miriam's house
 (b) His daughter's residence
 (c) Ali's grave
 (d) Laxmi Das' household
- (ii) What was the purpose of their visit?
 (a) A walk
 (b) to place Miriam's letter on Ali's grave
 (c) to pacify the staff
 (d) to visit the postmaster's daughter
- (iii) What lesson did the postmaster learn that day?
 (a) Letters have human worth
 (b) A letter must always be delivered
 (c) One must always control one's temper
 (d) One must never mock others

Answers : (i) (c) (ii) (b) (iii) (a)

7. "Ali came out very slowly, turning after every few steps to gaze at the post office. His eyes were filled with tears of helplessness, for his patience was exhausted, even though he still had faith."

[C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

- (i) Ali eyes were filled with tears because
 (a) the postmaster had misbehaved with him
 (b) Miriam had died
 (c) Ali was unwell
 (d) Miriam was unwell
- (ii) Ali had faith that
 (a) the postmaster would understand his feelings
 (b) he would be well soon
 (c) he would hear from Miriam
 (d) None of the above
- (iii) His patience was exhausted because
 (a) he was very tired
 (b) he could not convince the postmaster
 (c) he had not received any letter from Miriam during the last five years.
 (d) All of the above

Answers : (i) (a) (ii) (c) (iii) (c)

8. "Beholding the wooden arch of this building, the old man was filled with the joy that the pilgrim feels when he first sees the goal of his journey."

[C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

- (i) Ali's walking to the post office daily even in biting cold weather shows his
 (a) courage
 (b) optimism
 (c) foolishness
 (d) strength of will
- (ii) The post office is referred to as Ali's "place

of pilgrimage" as he

- (a) visited it daily.
 (b) came there to pray for a letter from his daughter.
 (c) went there with faith and hope.
 (d) believed God would bless him if he went there.

(iii) When did Ali's daughter get married?

- (a) One year ago
 (b) Two years ago
 (c) Three years ago
 (d) Five years ago

Answers : (i) (b) (ii) (c) (iii) (d)

9. "Beholding the wooden arch of this building, the old man was filled with the joy that the pilgrim feels when he first sees the goal of his journey."

(i) Who is the old man?

- (a) Ali
 (b) Lakshmi Das
 (c) Divan Sahib
 (d) Librarian

(ii) Which was the building that filled him with joy?

- (a) the office building
 (b) mosque
 (c) post office
 (d) pilgrimage

(iii) There he expected a letter from

- (a) his son
 (b) the postmaster's daughter
 (c) his daughter
 (d) his wife

Answers : (i) (a) (ii) (c) (iii) (c)

REFERENCE TO CONTEXT – NON-MCQs

Read the following passages and answer the questions given thereafter.

1. The old man, shivering at times but fixed of purpose, plodded on till he came out of the town-gate on to a straight road.

(a) Identify the old man.

Ans. The old man is Miriam's father.

(b) Explain — "fixed of purpose."

Ans. He was focussed and single-mindedly determined.

(c) Where was the old man going & why?

Ans. He used to go to the post office every day to check about Miriam's letter.

2. "Beholding the wooden arch of this building, the

old man was filled with the joy that the pilgrim feels when he first sees the goal of his journey.”

(a) **Name the building, with the wooden arch?**

Ans. The building was the post office.

(b) **Why was the old man filled with joy at its sight?**

Ans. The building gave him hope that Miriam’s letter may have arrived.

(c) **Why is the old man compared to a “pilgrim”?**

Ans. The post office had become a holy place for him and he was like a pilgrim on a holy journey.

3. *But when the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways and suddenly took a new turn.*

(a) **Explain — ‘evening of life was drawing in’?**

Ans. He was old, sick and on the verge of dying.

(b) **What were the man’s old ways?**

Ans. He had been a famous *shikari* and had killed many animals.

(c) **What new turn did his life take? Why?**

Ans. He gave up hunting due to separation from his only daughter Miriam.

4. *“I know! I know! But do you think we’ve got your Miriam’s house registered.”*

(a) **Identify the speaker.**

Ans. The speaker is the postmaster.

(b) **Discuss the context of the above remark.**

Ans. The postmaster is irritated because of Ali’s daily insistence for his daughter’s letter.

(c) **What was the result of the above remark on the listener?**

Ans. Ali felt very disheartened, miserable but did not lose hope.

5. *“Allah is there, and in his presence I am giving you this money. When it comes, you must forward my Miriam’s letter to me”.*

(a) **Whom is the speaker addressing?**

Ans. The old man is Ali and he is talking to Laxmi Das, a clerk.

(b) **What is the reason for giving the money?**

Ans. He wants him to deliver Miriam’s letter even when he is dead.

(c) **What is the speaker expecting from the listeners?**

Ans. He expects Laxmi Das to put Miriam’s letter on his grave.

6. *The haughty temper of the official had left him in his sorrow and anxiety and had laid bare his human heart.*

(a) **Who had a haughty temper?**

Ans. The postmaster.

(b) **How had this person become more human?**

Ans. His own daughter’s separation made him realise Ali’s misery and desperation.

(c) **How did he try to compensate for his misbehaviour?**

Ans. He decided to collect Miriam’s letter and went with Laxmi Das to lay it on Ali’s grave.

7. *“For several days Ali had not come to the post office. There was no one with enough sympathy or understanding to guess the reason, but all were curious to know what had stopped the old man.”*

[C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

(a) **Why did Ali come to the post office?**

Ans. Ali came to the post office to enquire about a letter from his daughter.

(b) **Why had Ali stopped coming to the post office?**

Ans. He had stopped coming to the post office because he was unwell.

(c) **What was they curious to know?**

Ans. They were curious to know why Ali had stopped coming to the post office.

SHORT ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. **What were the qualities that made Ali a good shikari?**

Ans : Ali was not only a famous shikari but also a crack-shot. He could smell and locate animals and birds from a great distance and kill them without any reason or compassion.

2. **Ali was a familiar figure at the post office, yet no one noticed his absence. What do you think could have been the reason?**

Ans : All the staff at the post office were busy in their routine work and they had never really bothered or cared about Ali. They were indifferent to him and treated him as a mad man. So his absence was not noticed by them.

3. **Do you think the postmaster was justified in calling Ali ‘a pest’? What was Ali’s reaction to this accusation?** [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans : The postmaster out of irritation had called Ali ‘a pest’. He had been fed up because of Ali’s persistence

for his daughter's letter. The postmaster was justified since he had never felt the pangs of separation from a child. Ali was totally depressed, crestfallen, humiliated but still optimistic about receiving a letter from his daughter

4. Why did the postmaster want to deliver the letter personally to Ali?

Ans : The postmaster realised the pangs of separation from one's child, when his own daughter did not respond. He feels guilty maltreating and humiliating Ali. So to compensate for his behaviour, he wished to handover Miriam's letter personally to Ali.

5. Draw a comparison between Ali and the postmaster as fathers.

Ans : Both the postmaster and Ali were fathers devoted to their daughters. Both of them felt the pangs of separation but the postmaster took lot of time to understand this. Ali's life had taken a turn due to his daughter, so had the postmaster's. Eventually they ended up feeling the same kind of emotions.

6. How did the postmaster and Laxmi Das compensate for their ill-treatment of Ali?

Ans : Both the postmaster and Laxmi Das went to Ali's grave and laid Miriam's letter on his grave. The postmaster had felt guilty of humiliating and maltreating Ali, so this was his only way of compensation.

7. "The newly-wakened father's heart in him was reproaching him for having failed to understand Ali's anxiety." What was the reason of this 'awakening'?

Ans : The cause of this "awakening" was his own anxiety about his daughter who was ill. His daughter was ill in another town and he had no information about her health. This made him understand Ali's feelings, his pain and his anguish :

8. Why did Coachman Ali give up his favourite sport? [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans : Coachman Ali had been a famous Shikari and a crackshot in his yester-years. After his daughter, Miriam, got married and left him, Ali understood the real meaning of love and separation. So he gave up hunting, his favourite sport.

9. How did post master's attitude towards Ali eventually change? [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans : Ali had become fixture at the post office. All the clerks as well as the Post-master were irritated with Ali's perserverance and tenacity. The post master even insulted him and called him a pest. But now when he himself was worried for his daughter, he realised Ali's misery. He regretted his behaviour and went to lay Miriam's letter on Ali's grave.

LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS

1. What is the theme of the lesson 'The Letter' written by Dhumaketu?

Ans : Love is the foundation of the entire universe and the desire to love and be loved is intrinsic in the nature of Man. The relationship of a parent and child forms the core-centre of the universe and no other relationship can equal it in intensity. Grief and separation from a child becomes very poignant and unbearable for a father and eternal wait for a child's letter can prove to be real torture. Coachman Ali is a symbol of endless patience, perseverance and his unshaken faith in Miriam's letter doesn't end with his death. Moreover, a grieving father can only understand the trauma and suffering of another father. Pain and suffering bring people together even if they are poles apart. So the author advocates the need for compassion, understanding, brotherhood, and empathy for the needy. Only this can sustain us in life.

2. Imagine you are Laxmi Das and have returned home after placing Miriam's letter on Ali's grave. You are confused and troubled by the postmaster's remarks. You also feel ashamed of

having accepted 5 guineas from Ali to deliver Ali's letter to his grave. Make a dairy entry expressing your feelings. (100 to 125 words)

Ans : Dear Diary,

Today I am expressing my heartfelt sorrow for the kind of treatment we all gave to Ali. I am deeply ashamed of my behaviour, but what has happened cannot be undone. I will never excuse myself for taking money from poor Ali, just to deliver a letter which should have been my duty otherwise also. I do not know how I couldn't feel Ali's misery his feelings, his pain and anguish in those days. Maybe our routine lives make us so inhuman. Nevertheless there is some consolation that Miriam's letter did reach Ali, even if it was on his grave.

Laxmi Das

3. The postmaster feels guilty when he finds that Ali is no longer alive. He writes a letter to Miriam explaining to her about Ali's wait for her letter and his death. Write the letter in 100-125 words. [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans : Minto Road,
ABC City
10 August, 2010
Dear Miriam,

This letter is going to surprise you immensely but it was very much needed. Your father, Ali, kept waiting desperately for your letter. Everyday he would come to the post office, in sickness or in bad weather, face the taunts of all the staff, just for your letter. When your letter came, he was dead, so we kept your letter on his grave. We offer you our heartfelt condolences.

Postmaster

- 4. “Ali’s wait for his daughter’s letter extends beyond his grave.” Bring out the truth of this statement by referring to the lesson ‘The Letter’.**

Ans : A parent’s entire life revolves around his child. A father is totally oblivious of his discomfort or suffering, in looking after his child. A child forms the core-centre of its parent’s universe. Pain of separation from a child is intolerable for a father. Coachman Ali’s life had changed dramatically after his daughter Miriam left him, after getting married to a soldier. Ali was desperate to know of her welfare but for five long years he never received a reply. Sickness, ridicule, sarcasm, nothing seemed to affect him. Ali relentlessly visited the post office before dawn and came back only after night. His diehard optimism, unshaking faith in Miriam’s letter remained steadfast. The death of his physical body couldn’t stop this eternal guest. He promptly appears to receive Miriam’s letter, at the stroke of five. An unearthly light and tears on his face, made the postmaster shrink back in fear and amazement. Ali ceased to exist in his physical body but the yearnings of his indomitable spirit is satisfied. His infinite patience wins in the end, even though he is dead.

- 5. Miriam visits her father’s grave, after his death, and is full of remorse and guilt to see her ‘unread’ letter lying on his grave. She is speechless to know of her father’s undying and unshaken faith and his endless wait for her letter. On her behalf, write an article, in the memory of her father titled, “Endless wait of a father.”**

OR

Imagine you are Miriam, the coachman’s daughter. Write a diary page, expressing your grief on your father’s demise and sharing your feelings of nostalgia. [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]

Ans : Dear Diary,

I am in a state of utter shock and I chastise myself thoroughly for my own conduct. How could I have been so thoughtless? How could I not have foreseen that a father’s heart will never rest in peace till he hears of the welfare of his child. I became so preoccupied in my own routine life and adjustments to marital life that I forgot that my father is old and sick. I feel so depressed to realise the mental agony that my father underwent. A word from me could have saved him from his daily trek to the post office, the insulting remarks of all others. My father tolerated so much for me. To see the unread letter on his grave is a scene, I will never forget. I don’t know now how to reach him, how to compensate for my behaviour. Oh God! I just pray for his soul to rest in peace.

Miriam

- 6. What is the role of ‘the letter’ in the story by ‘Dhumketu? [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]**

Ans : Letter plays a very significant role in the story. The writer wants to depict that the letters are not just envelopes and postcards, but they have great human worth. The main protagonist, Ali, visits post office every day in the hope of receiving a letter from his daughter who is married and lives with her husband. The people in the post office ignore him as a mad man. One day he visits the post office in bad health and gives money to one of the clerk to keep his daughter’s letter on his grave. Ali’s prediction proves true and he is not seen for sometime. By a strange turn of fate, the post master, who even called Ali a pest, finds himself in the similar situation as his daughter is not well, in another city, he anxiously waits for her letter. Now he realises the value of a child’s letter for a father. He chances upon Miriam’s letter and thinks of delivering the letter personally to Ali. He is shocked to learn that Ali has been dead for the past three months. The clerk recounts his last meeting with Ali. Both post master and the clerk visit Ali’s grave and place the letter on it. Thus the letter plays a significant role in the story by Dhumketu.

- 7. Imagine Ali writes a letter to one of his friends about what he does before his death. Write that letter on his behalf. [C.B.S.E. 2011 (T-1)]**

Ans : Dear Abdul,

Today I am feeling extremely sad, my health is deteriorating day by day and the day is not far when I would leave this material world. But before dying I have taken a harsh decision of bribing the clerk of the post office, against my wishes, to keep Miriam’s letter at my grave.

Dear Abdul, as you know, my whole life revolved round Miriam. After the death of her mother I acted both as father and mother to her. She is the core-centre of my universe. But after her marriage she has gone to live with her husband and I waited for her letter for five long years which I haven't yet received. I continuously visited the post office for all these years everyday, without fail, and bore the ridicule and sarcasm of the post office employees. But my unshaking faith in Miriam's letter remained steadfast.

Today my endless patience and perserverance gave

way. Moreover, my failing health doesn't permit me to go to the post office everyday. So I have given five guineas to a clerk, Lakshmi Das, at the post office and extracted a promise from him that he will deliver Miriam's letter to my grave otherwise I will not find peace in another world also.

Can't write the words 'see you soon' as I may not get a chance to see you.

Request you to take care of Miriam after my death.

Yours very own

Ali

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

1. You happened to read Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography 'My Experiments with Truth' and you are very appreciative of the frank honesty of Gandhiji. Write a letter to your friend Arpita, expressing your views.



M.K. Gandhi

2. Many times in our life our expectations are not fulfilled since the other party is too slow in reciprocation. Think of such a situation and enact it before your class. You can take the help of your friend to write the dialogues.
3. You are in a hostel and missing home too much. You are reminded of all the little things that your family did for you. Write an affectionate letter acknowledging their contribution and the help they had extended to you.



4. Pt. Nehru's letters to his daughter Indira Gandhi are part of history now. Make a Powerpoint Presentation or a project based on it on the topic "LETTERS FOR A DAUGHTER".