

## THE LETTER

Dear students

**No need to write the explanation of THE LETTER. It is for your convenience for your better understanding. Write the questions and answers in your note –book as instructed by the teacher.**

### Explanation:

**In the grey sky of early dawn stars still glowed, as happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close.**

Here, the grey sky refers to the sky at dawn i.e. daybreak. At that time, stars are still visible in the sky and night is coming to an end.

The writer compares a life nearing its end to the grey sky at dawn. The stars shining in the sky are like the sweet memories of young age which bring happiness to an otherwise dull life of old age which is nearing its end.

**An old man was walking through the town, now and again drawing his tattered clothes tighter to shield his body from the cold and biting wind.**

There was an old man who was passing through the town, he was constantly pulling his torn clothes again and again, and wrapping himself in them in order to protect himself from the cold and chilly wind.

**From some houses came the sound of grinding mills, and the sweet voices of women singing at their work, and the sounds helped him along his lonely way.**

As it was very early in the morning, the streets from which he used to pass were empty. The noise of grinding mills (people used to use it at that time for grinding seeds and flour) and sweet voices of women singing at their work were the only sounds that could be heard. They accompanied the old man on his otherwise lonely journey.

**Except for the occasional bark of a dog, the distant steps of a workman going early to work, or the screech of a bird disturbed before its time, the whole town was wrapped in deathly silence. Most of its inhabitants were still in the arms of sleep, the sleep which grew more and more profound on account of the intense winter cold; for the cold used sleep to extend its sway over all things even as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles.**

There was no sound except the barking of dogs, footsteps of workmen going to work, and the screech of birds who got disturbed in their sleep. The entire town was very silent, as silent as being dead. The cold weather put everyone to sleep. The writer compares the cold weather to an enemy in the guise of a friend. An enemy, who is disguised as a friend, lures his prey with a comforting and affectionate smile. Similarly, the cold weather befriends the people with the comfort of sleeping for long hours but actually the people are nearing death.

**The old man, shivering at times but fixed of purpose, plodded on till he came out of the town-gate onto a straight road. Along this he now went at a somewhat slower pace, supporting himself on his old staff. On one side of the road was a row of trees, on the other side the town's public garden. The sky was darker now and the cold more intense, for the wind was blowing straight along the road, on which they fell like frozen snow, only the faint light of the morning star.**

The old man was shivering because of the cold, but firm and determined to walk; slowly he came out of the town gate onto the main road. By the time he reached the straight road he got more tired which made him even slower. He used the stick for support while walking. As it was an open area, there were trees on one side of the road and a public garden on the other, the wind was stronger which made the cold more intense. The sky seemed to be darker, only the morning star were visible ( it could be Mercury / Venus /

Sirius which appear in the sky before sunrise and are known as morning stars.). He found it difficult to walk on the straight road as the wind was blowing and the cold became more intense.

**At the end of the garden stood a handsome building of the newest style, and the light gleamed through the crevices of its closed doors and windows. 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. On the arch hung an old board with the newly painted letters "Post Office."**

The old man reached the post office, build up in newest architectural style. The light gleamed through a narrow opening of its closed door and windows which means the place was working. As he caught sight of the wooden arch of this building, he was full of joy just like a pilgrim is when he reaches his destination, the holy place or pilgrimage. For him post office was a sacred place.

**The old man went in quietly and squatted on the veranda. The voices of two or three people busy and their routine work could be faintly heard through the wall. "Police Superintendent," a voice called sharply. The old man started at the sound, but composed himself again to wait. But for the faith and love, that warmed him, he could not have borne the bitter cold.**

He entered the post office quietly, and squatted on the veranda. He heard some voices through the wall. He was eager to hear his name being called out and so, started up when "police superintendent" was called out, only to realized that it was not his name and went back to wait for his turn.. The love for his child gave him immense warmth which helped him survive the extremely cold weather.

**Name after name rang out from within as the clerk read out the English addresses in the letters and flung them to the waiting postmen. From long practice he had acquired great speed at reading out the titles - Commissioner, Superintendent, Diwan Sahib, Librarian - and in flinging the letters out.**

The clerk was reading the titles of the letters and giving them to the postman at a great speed, which tells that the clerk was experienced.

**In the midst of this procedure a jesting voice from inside called, "Coachman Ali! The old man got up, raised his eyes to heaven in gratitude and stepping forward put his hands to the door.**

A voice called out for Coachman Ali. It was the old man's name. When the voice called his name, he stood up, thanked god and reached the door.

**"Gokul Bhai!"**

**"Yes who is there?"**

**"You called out coachman Ali's name didn't you. Here I am I have come for my letter.**

**"It's a mad man, sir, who worries us by calling every day for letters that never come," said the clerk to the postmaster. The old man went back slowly to the bench on which he had been accustomed to sit for five long years.**

When he enquired the postmaster that his name was called, the clerk said the postmaster that the old man is actually mad. He bothers them by going up to them every day, asking for his letter which never arrives. (They had played a prank on him by calling out his name although there was no letter for him).

**The old man went back slowly to the bench on which he had been accustomed to sit for five long years.**

The disappointed old man, backs off to the bench. He had been living this routine for the last years, just in the hope of receiving a letter.

**Ali had been a clever shikari. As his skill increased so did his love for the hunt, till at last it was as impossible for him to pass a day without hunting as it is for the opium-eater to forgo his daily portion. When Ali sighted the earth-brown partridge , almost invisible to other eyes, the poor bird, they said, was as good as in his bag.**

Ali was a hunter in his young age, a clever one. To Ali, hunting was like a drug, he was so addicted to it that it was impossible to pass a day without hunting. He could sight the earth-brown partridge bird, which is almost invisible to other eye; he would hunt down the bird as soon as he spotted it and put it in his bag.

**His sharp eyes saw the hare crouching. Even when the dogs failed to see the creature cunningly hidden in the yellow brown scrub, Ali's eyes would catch the sight of his ears; and in another moment it was dead. Besides this he would often go out with his friends, the fishermen.**

Ali had very sharp eyes. He would spot a rabbit hidden behind the yellow – brown bushes. The rabbit would skillfully deceive the dogs from finding it but it could not hide from the clever eyes of Ali. Once spotted, the next moment it was dead. He would also go for fishing with his friends.

**But when the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways and suddenly took a new turn. His only child, Miriam married and left him.**

In the latter or concluding period of his old age, his only daughter, Miriam got married and eventually left him. This was the turning point in Ali's life.

**She went off with a soldier into his regiment in the Punjab, and for the last five years he had no news of this daughter for whose sake alone he dragged along a cheerless existence. Now he understood the meaning of love and separation. He could no longer enjoy the sportsman's pleasure and laughter at the bewildered terror of the young partridges bereft of their parents.**

She got married to a soldier who was posted in Punjab regiment, and for the last 5 years there was no news of her which made him unhappy and sad because of separation from his daughter. When Ali would hunt down partridges, their young ones had confused and scared faces due to the loss of their parents. The sight of this expression on their face gave Ali pleasure and was fun for him. Now, he himself suffered the pain of separating from a loved one and so, no longer enjoyed hunting.

**Although the hunter's instinct was in his very blood and bones, such loneliness had come into his life since the day Miriam had gone away, that now, forgetting his sport, he would become lost in the admiration of the green cornfield. He reflected deeply, and came to the conclusion that the whole universe is built up through love and that the grief of separation is inescapable.**

Although he still had that skill and ability but the pain of separation was too deep, which got into him from the very day his daughter left. He left his sport and instead started admiring nature. Now Ali realized that life revolves around love and attachment towards family and the loss of a loved one makes everyone sad.

**And seeing this, he sat down under a tree and wept bitterly. From that day he had risen each morning at 4 o'clock to walk to the post-office. In his whole life he had never received a letter, but with a devout serenity born of hope and faith, he persevered and was always the first to arrive.**

After realization from that day, he made a routine of getting up at 4 AM, and going to the post office, in hope of receiving any letter from his daughter. He continued the course of action even in the face of difficulty or with little or no indication of success.

**The post office, one of the uninteresting buildings in the world, became his place of pilgrimage. He always occupied a particular seat in a particular corner of the building, and when the people got to know his habit they laughed at him. The postmen began to make a game of him. Even though there was no letter for him they would call out his name for the fun of seeing him jump up and come to the door. But with a boundless faith and infinite patience, he came every day, and went away empty-handed.**

The post office is referred as a pilgrimage because just like people go daily to temples and other place of worship regularly, he goes to the post office. When the employees got to know about it, they mocked him every time, they called out his name to tease him. Even after all this he never stopped going as he had hope and patience.

**While Ali waited, peons would come for their firms' letters and he would hear them discussing their masters' scandals. These smart young peons in their spotless turbans and creaking shoes were always eager to express themselves. Meanwhile, the door would be thrown open and the post-master, a man with a face as sad and as inexpressive as a pumpkin, would be seen sitting on his chair inside. There was no glimmer of animation in his features; such men usually prove to be village schoolmasters, office clerks or postmasters. One day, he was there as usual and did not move from his seat when the door was opened.**

Ali would over hear other men who would come to the post office to take their master's letters and would gossip about them. They would be well-dressed.

The post master's face has been compared to pumpkin, because just like pumpkin is inexpressive, Ali never saw the postmaster talking, he had a blank expressionless face.

**"Police Commissioner!" the clerk called out, and a young fellow stepped forward briskly for the letters.**

**"Superintendent!" Another voice called. Another peon came. And so the clerk, like a worshipper of Vishnu, repeated his customary thousand names.**

The next day again, the same routine was followed in the post office. The peon called out the names in quick succession just like a priest worships God and recites his various names.

**At last they had all gone. Ali got up too and saluting the post-office as though it housed some precious relic, went off. A pitiable figure a century behind his time.**

When everyone took their letters and went, Ali stood up and saluted to the post office as though it was a sacred place and went away. He was pitiable and old fashioned as in the fast paced world, he had been waiting for a letter for the past five years.

**"That fellow," asked the post-master "is he mad?"**

**"Who, sir? Oh, yes," answered the clerk "no matter what the weather is he has been here everyday for the last five years. But he doesn't get many letters."**

**"I can well understand that! Who does he think will have time to write a letter every day?"**

**"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 statement.**

The post master saw Ali saluting the post office, so he asked the clerk if Ali was mad, to which clerk agreed, and added that he had done many sins in the past as he was a hunter, so he had taken a lot of lives, for enjoyment. Now, he was paying for it.

**"Mad-men are strange people," the postmaster said.**

**"Yes. Once I saw a postman in Ahmedabad who did absolutely nothing but make little heaps of dust. And another had a habit of going to the river bed in order to pour water on a certain stone everyday!"**

**"Oh! That's nothing" chimed in another. "I knew one madman who paced up and down all day long, another who never ceased declaiming poetry and a third who would slap himself on the cheek and then begin to cry because he was being beaten."**

**And everyone in the post office began to talk of lunacy. All working class people have the habit of taking periodic rests by joining in general discussion for a few minutes.**

Everyone in the office joined in the conversation, and started to share their stories of encounters with mad people and about their mental illness and acts.

**After listening a while, the postmaster got up and said, "It seems as though the mad live in a world of their own making. To them perhaps we too appear mad. The mad-man's world is rather like the poet's, I should think!"**

**He laughed as he spoke the last words, looking at one of the clerks who wrote indifferent verse. Then he went out and the office became still again.**

The postmaster compares mad men to poets because just like a poet has a different vision and imagination, mad people also have a different imagination. As the postmaster said that poets are like mad people who have a world of their own, he looks at a postman who writes poetry, and goes away.

**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.**

No one was bothered about Ali's well being but they were eager to make fun of him and so were wondering at the reason for his absence for the past many days.

**At last he came again; but it was a struggle for him to breathe and on his face were clear signs of approaching end. That day he could not contain his impatience.**

**"Master Sahib", he begged the post-master, "have you a letter from my Miriam?"**

**The postmaster wanted to get out to the country, and was in a hurry.**

**"What a pest you are, brother!" he exclaimed.**

**"My name is Ali," answered Ali absent-mindedly.**

**"I know! I know! But do you think we've got your Miriam's name registered?"**

After some days, he visited the post office, but was so weak and ill, had problem in breathing. It was clear that his life was about to end. Unlike other days, this day he was impatient.

He called the postmaster and enquired about his letter. Post master was in a hurry, so he got irritated and spoke ill about Ali. Ali gave his details absent mindedly not realizing being called a pest.

**Then please note it down, brother. It will be useful if a letter should come when I am not here." For how should the villager who had spent three-quarters of his life hunting know that Miriam's name was not worth a pice to anyone but her father?**

He is impatient and absent minded and so asks him to note down his daughter's name in case a letter arrives from her in his absence. He had spent 3/4th of his life in hunting and so did not realize that Miriam was only important to him and to no one else.

**The postmaster was beginning to lose his temper. "Have you no sense?" he cried.**

**"Get away! Do you think we're going to eat your letter when it comes?" and he walked off hastily. 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. Yet how could he still hope to hear from Miriam?**

**Ali heard one of the clerks coming up behind him, and turned to him.**

**"Brother!" he said.**

**The clerk was surprised, but being a decent fellow he said, "Well!"**

**"Here, look at this!" and Ali produced an old tin box and emptied five golden guineas into the surprised clerk's hands. "Do not look so startled," he continued.**

**"They will be useful to you, and they can never be to me. But will you do one thing?"**

**"What?"**

**"What do you see up there?" said Ali, pointing to the sky.**

**"Heaven."**

**"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."**

The post master lost his temper and shouted at Ali and walked away hurriedly. Ali was heartbroken and very slowly came out of the building knowing this was his last visit there. His eyes were wet, his patience was lost, but he still had some hope. With little hope he called one of the clerk and offered him five gold coins. The clerk was shocked. Ali continued and told the clerk that in presence of heaven and god he is giving these

gold coins to him, and whenever he receives the letter from Miriam he must deliver it to him.

**"But where---where am I supposed to send it?" asked the utterly bewildered clerk. "To my grave." "What?" "Yes. It is true. Today is my last day: my very last, alas!**

**And I have not seen Miriam, I have had no letter from her." There were tears in Ali's eyes as the clerk slowly left him and went on his way with the five golden guineas in his pocket.**

The clerk was shocked and asked where as he supposed to deliver the letter, to which Ali replied "to my grave" as he believed that day, was his last. Ali was broken, and cried, and eventually left slowly.

**Ali was never seen again, and no one troubled to inquire after him.**

**One day, however, trouble came to the postmaster.**

**His daughter lay ill in another town, and he was anxiously waiting for news of her. The post was brought in, and the letters piled on the table. Seeing an envelope of the colour and shape he expected, the postmaster eagerly snatched it up. It was addressed to Coachman Ali, and he dropped it as though it had given him an electric shock. The haughty temper of the official had quite left him in his sorrow and anxiety, and had laid bare his human heart.**

After that day no one saw Ali. One day, the postmaster's daughter became ill. He was eagerly waiting for a letter from her to know her well-being. When he saw the letter he was expecting was his, he snatched it up and he got a shock by reading coachman Ali's name on it. Now as he was so anxious and sad for his daughter, his temperament had also changed.

**He knew at once that this was the letter the old man had been waiting for: it must be from his daughter Miriam.**

**"Lakshmi Das!" called the postmaster, for such was the name of the clerk to whom Ali had given his money.**

**"Yes, sir?" "This is for your old coachman, Ali. Where is he now?"**

**"I will find out, sir."**

The postmaster called in the clerk to whom Ali has given the gold coins and asked him to find Coachman Ali.

**The postmaster did not 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 four o'clock," he mused, "I will give him the letter myself."**

That day the postmaster did not receive any letter, he went to the post office at 3, next morning. (The postmaster is also behaving similar to Ali.) He thought to himself that when Ali arrived, he would himself give him the letter.



**For now the postmaster understood Ali's heart and his very soul. After spending but a single night in suspense, anxiously waiting for news of his daughter, his heart was brimming with sympathy for the poor old man who had spent his nights in the same suspense for the last five years.**

The postmaster experienced what Ali used to feel for 5 years, which made him understand Ali's condition. The postmaster had sympathy for the poor old man.

**At the stroke of five he heard a soft knock on the door: he felt sure it was Ali. He rose quickly from his chair, his suffering father's heart recognizing another, and flung the door wide open.**

**"Come in, brother Ali," he cried, handing the letter to the meek old man, bent double with age, who was standing outside. Ali was leaning on a stick, and the tears were wet on his face as they had been when the clerk left him.**

At 5, the postmaster heard a knock on his door, to which he was sure it was Ali, he invited him in. Ali appeared just like the way the clerk had left him. He was bent on a stick and tears were flowing from his eyes.

**But his features had been hard then, and now they were softened by lines of kindness. He lifted his eyes and in them was a light so unearthly that the postmaster shrank back in fear and astonishment.**

The unearthly light implies that it was not Ali but his soul which was still waiting for the letter. The postmaster got a shock.

**Lakshmi Das had heard the postmaster's words as he came towards the office from another quarter. "Who was that, sir? Old Ali?" he asked. But the postmaster took no notice of him. He was staring with wide-open eyes at the doorway from which Ali had disappeared. Where could he have gone? At last he turned to Lakshmi Das. "Yes, I was speaking to Ali," he said.**

**"Old Ali is dead, sir. But give me his letter."**

**"What! But when? Are you sure, Lakshmi Das?"**

**"Yes, that is so," broke in a postman who had just arrived. "Ali died three months ago."**

On hearing the post master, Lakshmi Das asked who was he talking to. The postmaster was so astonished that he did not reply but later said that he was talking to Ali, to which he replied, that Ali had died three months ago.

**The postmaster was bewildered. Miriam's letter was still lying near the door, Ali's image was still before his eyes. He listened to Lakshmi Das's recital of the last interview, but he could still not doubt the reality of the knock on the door and the tears in Ali's eyes. He was perplexed. Had he really seen Ali? Had his imagination deceived him? Or had it perhaps been Lakshmi Das?**

The postman got confused as he had just seen Ali. Lakshmi Das narrated his last interaction with Ali when he gave him the five gold guineas. The postmaster could not believe the news as Ali's face was fresh in his mind. He was confused.

**The daily routine began. The clerk read out the addresses- Police Commissioner, Superintendent, Librarian - and flung the letters deftly.**

**But the postmaster now watched them as eagerly as though each contained a warm, beating heart. He no longer thought of them in terms of envelopes and postcards.**

**He saw the essential human worth of a letter.**

Now, the irony is that the postmaster who used to make fun of Ali, was himself going through the same phase. Now he realizes that a letter is not just a piece of paper, every letter contains a message for a loved one.

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

In the evening, he along with Lakshmi Das went to Ali's grave to deliver the letter from his daughter Miriam.

**"Lakshmi Das, were you indeed the first to come to the office this morning?"**

**"Yes, sir, I was the first."**

**"Then how.... No. I don't understand...."**

**"What, sir?"**

**"Oh, never mind," the postmaster said shortly.**

The postmaster was still confused and so clarified from Lakshmi Das that was he the first one to arrive at the post office that morning.

**At the office he parted from Lakshmi Das and went in. The newly-wakened father's heart in him was reproaching him for having failed to understand Ali's anxiety, for now he himself had to spend another night of restless anxiety. Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait.**

The postman was suffering immensely from the feeling of doubt as he had not got any communication about his daughter's well – being. He was full of sadness as he had failed to understand Ali.

#### **New Words:**

- **Inhabitants:** A person or animal that lives in a particular place.
- **Profound:** Having great knowledge or understanding.
- **Plodded:** To walk slowly and usually heavily.
- **Crevice:** A narrow opening or crack in a hard surface.
- **Midst:** The middle area or part of something.
- **Devout:** Deeply religious.
- **Serenity:** Calmness.
- **Relic:** Something that is from the past time, culture.
- **Pitiable:** Deserving pity or sympathy.
- **Chimed:** Added to it.

- **Lunacy:** Extreme mental illness.
- **Tattered:** Old and torn.
- **Shield:** a protection, guard
- **Dawn:** the first appearance of light in the sky before sunrise.
- **Screech:** A loud and very high sound.
- **Caressing:** To touch in a gentle way.
- **Lulls:** put to sleep.
- **Victim:** A person who is attacked/ robbed/ cheated by someone else.
- **Diwan sahib:** a senior government official
- **Crouching:** To lower your body to the ground by bending your legs.
- **Bewildered:** confused.
- **Bereft:** sad and lonely, especially through someone's death or departure.
- **Persevered:** continue in a course of action even in the face of difficulty or with little or no indication of success.
- **Scandals:** An occurrence where people are shocked and upset because of wrong behavior.
- **Customary:** Usually done in particular way, in particular place or time.
- **Precinct:** the area within the walls or perceived boundaries of a particular building or place.
- **Verse:** Writing in which words are arranged in a rhythmic pattern.
- **Hastily:** Hurriedly
- **Exhausted:** State where all the mental or physical energy is completely used up.
- **Guineas:** An old British currency (coin).
- **Staff:** Group of people who work for an organization.
- **Suspense:** Feeling or state of nervousness or excitement caused by wondering what will happen.
- **Meek:** Having or showing gentle nature.

- **Perplexed:** puzzled
- **Deceived:** made to believe something that is not true.
- **Remorse:** Feeling of guilt.
- **Anxiety:** Feeling of nervousness about what might happen.

### **Summary:**

"The Letter" is an emotional story of an old man named Ali who is all alone and waiting for a letter from his only child, his daughter named Miriam. But unfortunately he receives that letter only at his grave.

Ali had been a brilliant hunter who derived pleasure from the terrorized faces of the young ones of the dying birds. After his daughter's marriage, he was left alone. His daughter, Miriam left home with her husband, a soldier in a regiment in Punjab. Having understood the meaning of love and separation, he could no longer enjoy hunting.

Since then, he had been regularly visiting the post office in the early morning, expecting a letter from his daughter Miriam. However, it never came and he would return back disappointed. The post office staff often made fun of him. The clerk even called out his name jokingly even there was no letter for him. Suddenly, for several days, Ali did not come to the post office. Everyone was curious to know the reason behind this.

At last, he did come. But now it was difficult for him even to breathe and there were clear signs of his nearing death. Finally, he met the postmaster and asked him for Miriam's letter. The post master scolded Ali because he was very busy. Consequently, Ali called a clerk and gave him five golden coins and asked him to deliver his letter, if it would come, to his grave. Then he slowly left and was not seen after that day.

One day, the post master's daughter fell ill and he was anxious to hear from her. He searched for the letter from his daughter in the pile of letters and picked up a letter, the kind he expected. It was addressed to "Coachman Ali". Now he realized his mistake. He called Lakshmi Das, a clerk and asked him to find out Ali. That day he did not receive his letter and decided that he would hand over Ali's letter himself.

In the post office, the next morning he opened the door and saw Ali leaning on a stick with tears in his eyes. His eyes had a light so unearthly that the postmaster got scared. But, suddenly he disappeared. Lakshmi Das, the clerk was shocked to hear the postmaster call out the name of Coachman Ali who had now been dead for three months. The letter was found near the door. Lakshmi Das tells him about his last meeting with Ali to convince him.

That evening both of them went to place the letter on Ali's grave. The post master repented for his attitude and thought that he should have been more sympathetic and helpful towards Ali. He was no longer ill-tempered.

**Question and Answers:**

**Q.1: Answer the questions by ticking the correct options:**

**1: 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**

**A1.1: (iv)**

**2: 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**

**2: (iii)**

**3. The Post Master's rudeness to Ali reveals his \_\_\_\_\_.**

- i.Lack of empathy**
- ii.Preoccupation with his work**
- iii.Preconceived notions**
- iv.Sensitivity**

**3: (i)**

**4. Ali did not come to the Post Office for several days as \_\_\_\_\_.**

- i.He had given up hope**
- ii.He was upset by the Post Master's rebuke**

**iii. He was unwell and not able to walk to the Post Office**

**iv. He was busy hunting**

4: (iii)

**5. "Tortured by doubt and remorse, he sat down in the glow of the charcoal sigri to wait." The Post Master 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.**

5: (ii)

**Q2: Who was Ali? Where did he go daily?**

A2: Coachman Ali was a frail old man who had been a clever hunter in his youth. His daughter Miriam had married a soldier and went away to Punjab with him five years ago. Since then Ali visited the post office every day waiting for a letter from her to know about her well-being.

**Q3: "Ali displays qualities of love and patience". Give evidence from the story to support the statement.**

A3: Ali's love for his daughter is proved from the fact that every day for the last five years he walked to the post office, in the hope that one day he would receive a letter from her. He would sit there waiting for his name to be called out. Although he did not receive a letter for the past five years, he did not give up. He would even bear the insults and pranks of the postmen patiently. All this indicates that he had love and patience in him.

**Q4: How do you know Ali was a familiar figure at the post office?**

A4: Ali was a familiar figure at the post office as he had been regularly visiting it for the past five years. It was a place of pilgrimage for him. All the postmen knew his name and his purpose of visit. They rebuked him, called him mad and played pranks on him by calling out his name and watching him jump up to the window.

**Q5: Why did Ali give up hunting?**

A5: When Ali's only child, his daughter Miriam married a soldier and went away with him, he realized the pain and sorrow of separating from a loved one. It was then that he realized that he had been committing a sin all his life. He would hunt animals and birds, watching their terror stricken, grieving young ones gave him pleasure. Now that he suffered similar agony, he realized his sins and gave up on it.

**Q6: What impression do you form of the postmaster after reading the story 'The Letter'?**

A6: The post master is arrogant and cold. He scolds Ali for bothering the staff at the post office and says that they would not eat his letter if at all it arrived. Later on when he suffers from a similar situation like Ali's, he realizes what he had been going through. He is compassionate towards Ali and waits to handover the letter himself. He even walks up to his grave to deliver Ali's letter. This shows that although the post master's behaviour was rude and cold, he had emotions and concern for others too.

**Q7: The postmaster says to Ali, "What a pest you are, brother!" Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons for your answer.**

A7: The postmaster was in a hurry and so in reply to Ali's query about a letter from his daughter, calls him a pest. He is not justified in calling him a pest. Ali had been visiting the post office for the last five years and would sit patiently, waiting for his name to be called out. He never disturbed the postmen and did not react when they played pranks on him. This shows that he had been patient and not a pest.

**Q8: "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." Why were Ali's eyes filled with tears of helplessness?**

**OR**

**What had exhausted his patience but not his faith?**

A8: Ali's eyes were filled with tears of helplessness because neither did he receive any letter from his daughter, nor did the postmen have concern and sympathy towards him. He had been visiting the post office every day for the last five years. The post office was his 'pilgrimage' but now as he was suffering from ill – health, his patience had exhausted. He was optimistic and had undeterred faith. He believed that one day a letter from his daughter would surely arrive.

**Q9: "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?**



A9: The post master was tortured by doubt and remorse. As he had not got any news of his daughter's well – being, he was anxious and in doubt. He was remorseful as now he could relate to Ali and understood the pain he was undergoing.

He is waiting for a letter from his daughter to know of her well – being.

**Q10: Explain the following phrases/ sentences in your own words:**

**1. Happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close.**

A: Ali was old was nearing his end. His dull and sad life became happy by the memories of his young age.

**2. The sounds helped him along his lonely way.**

A: As Ali walked down a deserted street, the familiar sounds of grinding mills and women singing gave him strength and courage to move on.

**3. The cold used sleep to extend its sway over all things even as a false friend lulls his chosen victim with caressing smiles.**

A: A false friend soothes his victim by his gentle smile to lay his doubts at rest. Similarly, the cold weather used sleep to lay all the people at rest and gradually kill them in their sleep.

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

A: As Ali became old and his death was approaching, he gave up his occupation of hunting animals and totally changed his attitude and behavior.

**5. The whole universe is built up through love and that the grief of separation is inescapable.**

A: The entire universe survives on love and no one can escape the sadness of separating from his loved ones.

**6. The post-master, a man with a face as sad and as inexpressive as a pumpkin, would be seen sitting on his chair inside.**

A: The postmaster's face was sad and expressionless like a pumpkin.

**7. And so the clerk, like a worshipper of Vishnu, repeated his customary thousand names.**

A: A worshipper of lord Vishnu repeats his traditional thousand names in quick succession as he is well – versed with them. Similarly, the clerk spoke out the names of the recipients on the letters.

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

A: The postmaster was sad as he had no news about his daughter. He no longer remained rude and cold, rather he became compassionate towards Ali. He could relate to his pain and suffering.

### **Previous Year CBSE board Questions from the chapter**

**Q11: How and why did Ali revere the building of the post office? Why has Ali's journey to the post office been described as a 'pilgrimage'?**

A11: Ali considered the post office to be a place of pilgrimage. He visited it every day, unmindful of the bad weather and his ill – health. He revered the building as there he could receive a letter from his daughter about her well – being. This information would give him peace and comfort and so the post office was sacred for Ali.

Ali's journey to the post office was tedious and harsh. He faced extreme weather conditions, struggled with ill – health but kept his willpower and determination. He went on this journey each and every day with immense devotion and faith. Hence, it was a pilgrimage for him.

**Q12: How did Ali's life take a new turn after his daughter's marriage?**

**OR**

**How did separation from Miriam change Ali's life forever?**

A12: Ali's daughter married a soldier and went away with him. He was left alone and then he realized that love was the bond which had joined the entire Universe together and that the sadness of separating from a loved one did not spare anyone. This completely changed his life as from that day till his death, he gave up hunting and waited for a letter from his daughter about her well – being.

**Q13: Why was Ali impatient when he visited the post office after many days?**

A13: Ali had given up patience when he visited the post office after several days of absence. He knew that his end had come but still he had not got any news of his daughter's well – being.

**Q14: What did Ali do to ensure that he would get his letter even after his death?**

**OR**

**Whom did Ali meet on his way back from the post office? What request did he make to him?**

A14: Ali knew that his end had come but his daughter's letter had not yet arrived. He gave five gold guineas to a postman named Lakshmi Das and asked him to deliver his letter at his grave

.

**Q15: Why was the postmaster keen to deliver the letter to Ali himself?**

**What were the changes in him after he delivered the letter?**

A15: The postmaster wanted to deliver the letter himself. The sight of happiness and satisfaction on Ali's face would give the postmaster satisfaction and make him guilt – free.

The postmaster was a changed person after he delivered the letter to Ali's grave. He no longer treated the envelopes and letters as pieces of paper. He now realized that each envelope contained a letter which was a 'warm, beating heart'. A 'warm, beating heart' implies that he now realized that a letter was full of feelings and emotions sent by a person to another. Now he knew the importance of these feelings for both the persons. He became humane towards them.

**Q16: Do you think Ali's suffering was a result of his habit of ruthless hunting? Does he deserve the punishment he got? Support your answer with argument.**

A16: Yes, I think that Ali's suffering was a result of his ruthlessness. He had separated many animals from their loved ones by killing them. He would enjoy looking at their terrorized, grieving faces. His separation from his daughter was destiny's way of punishing him and teaching him a lesson. This was the only way by which he could realize that he had committed sins. When he went through the pain and grief of losing a loved one, he realized the pain of the innocent animals. So, God had taught him the right lesson.

**Q17: Was the postmaster's encounter with Ali towards the end of the story real or imaginary? Give reasons in support of your answer.**

A17: The postmaster's encounter with Ali was imaginary. When he looked into Ali's eyes, there was an unearthly light in them which indicates that it was not Ali but his soul which wandered there and appeared in the postmaster's imagination.

**Q18: What strange wish did Ali make in his last meeting with Gokul? Why? Was it fulfilled?**

A18: The strange wish made by Ali was that Gokul should deliver the letter from Ali's daughter at Ali's grave. Ali knew that his death had come and so he made such a strange wish.

Yes, his wish was fulfilled as both Gokul and the postmaster delivered the letter at his grave. 4

**Q19: Is the title “The Letter” apt? Why / Why not?**

A19: The title of the story is appropriate as the life of the main character, Coachman Ali revolves around it. The story is all about the essence and importance of the letter which Ali has been seeking for the last five years.

**Q20: Compare Ali and the postmaster as fathers.**

A20: Both Ali and the postmaster are similar as fathers. They are extremely concerned about the wellbeing of their daughters. They are anxious and sad when they do not receive letter from their respective daughters and display the affections of a father.