

THE LETTER

By Dhumkethu

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. Every day, Ali goes back dejected and empty-handed. Everyone at the post office considers him mad and derives pleasure in tormenting him.

One day Ali is in a 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'll 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 3 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 post master and Laxmi Das visit Ali's grave and place the letter on it.

This proves to be a very traumatic experience for the post master. He realizes that letters are not just envelopes and post cards, 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.

Exercise – 1: Reference to Context

1. **“But when the evening of his life was drawing in, he left his old ways suddenly, took a new turn.**
 - a. Explain “evening of life was drawing in”
 - b. What were the man’s old ways?
 - c. What new turn did his life take? Why?

2. **“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?
 - b. What is the reason for giving the money?
 - c. What is the speaker expecting from the listeners?

3. **“the haughty temper of the official had quite left him in his sorrow and anxiety and had laid back his human heart”**
 - a. Who had a haughty temper?
 - b. How had this person become more human?
 - c. How did he try to compensate for his misbehavior?

Exercise – 2: General Questions

1. The letter is the main crux around which the entire lesson revolves. Discuss.
2. Discuss the significance of the title of the lesson.
3. 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 diary entry expressing your feelings. (100-150 words)
4. 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. (100-150 words)