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**7.0 OBJECTIVES**

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In this story, we shall learn

- well-known short story of Gaurishankar Govardhanram Joshi (Dhumketu)
- theme, character, content and tone of the story
- critical analysis of the story
- the fact how a good story tones human emotions through the realistic portrayal of universal emotions of human love and relations.

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**7.1 ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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Gaurishankar Govardhanram Joshi known as ‘Dhumketu’ was born in 1892 and died in 1965. He was one of the versatile Gujarati writers who wrote one of the major pioneers of Gujarati short stories (Navlika). He published 24 collections of short stories and thirty two novels plays and travelogues. His novels dealt with social and historical subjects. His major works include.

1. *Tankha* (Four Volumes of short stories) (1926)
2. *Avashesh* (1922) collection of short stories
3. *Pradeep* (Collection of short stories) (1933)
4. *Mallika Ane Biji vartao* (1937)
5. *Tribheto* (Collection of short stories) (1938)
6. *Aakashdeep* (collection of short stories) (1947)

7. *Parivesh* (collection of short stories) (1949)
8. *Anamika* (Collection of short story) (1949)
9. *Vanchhaya* (Collection of short story) (1949)
10. *Pratibimba* (Collection of short story) (1951)
11. *Vanrekha* (Collection of short story) (1942)
12. *Jaldeep* (Collection of short story) (1953)
13. *Vankunj* (Collection of short story) (1954)
14. *Vanrenu* (Collection of short story) (1956)
15. *Mangaldeep* (Collection of short story) (1957)
16. *Chandralekha* (Collection of short story) (1959)
17. *Nikunj* (Collection of short story) (1960)
18. *Sandhyarang* (Collection of short story) (1961)
19. *Sandhyatej* (Collection of short story) (1962)
20. *Vasantkunj* (Collection of short story) (1964)
21. *Chhelo Jhabakaro* (Collection of short story) (1964)

He wrote 492 short stories and 29 historical and social novels. He dealt with Chalukya Yuga and Gupta Yuga in his historical novels. He wrote a biographical work on Hemchandracharya a famous Jain scholar, critical, thinker and poet. He wrote two autobiographical works *Jivan Panth* and *Jivan Ranga* that give a vivid glimpse of his personal life and his journey as a creative writer.

In 1935, he was awarded Ranjitram Suvarna Chandrak which he refused to accept. In 1949, he received Narmad Suvarna Chandrak. He served as an adviser to the Sahitya Akademi, Delhi, for Gujarati literature in 1957. The story 'The Letter' was included in the collection of the best stories from 60 countries. This story was also included in 'Contemporary Indian Short Stories' published by Sahitya Akademi, Delhi. It was also included in the book 'The Best Loved Indian Stories of the Century' published by Penguin Books.

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## 7.2 ABOUT THE SHORT STORY

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*The Letter* is a remarkable story by Dhumketu. The story tells the readers how the feelings and emotions of a man should be taken care of and what would be the consequences if someone's emotions are hurt. It is the story of an old coachman waiting for the letter from his daughter with indomitable patience till he dies.

The story begins with old Coachman Ali walking towards a post office on a cold morning in tattered clothes to inquire whether the letter from his daughter has arrived. It was a cold winter dawn with chilling winds. There was a deafening silence interrupted by barks of a dog, squeal of birds and the sounds of grinding mills and women singing. People were still sleeping cozily in warm blankets movelessly but at such a time, Ali, the coachman walked toward the post office with a walking stick as his sole companion.

Ali reached the post office and sat down on the verandah as he heard the muffled chatter of the postal employees in side. For Ali, the post office was like a holy place of pilgrimage. He used to visit the post office every morning for the last four years. The postal clerk sorted letters calling the names of the

addressees and flinging the letters to the postmen. Ali had been waiting for the call of his daughter Miriam.

Then someone from inside calls his name and Ali sprang to his feet even though old age had weakened his energy. His faith and hope still energized him. However there was no letter for Ali. The postal employees often made fun of him. Disappointed; he went back to the bench. He had undergone such an ordeal for many years but he had never lost his hope.

Ali in his younger days was a skilled hunter. He never missed his aim and killed his prey. He also enjoyed fishing. As he grew older, his passion for hunting vanished and he stopped hunting. His ruthless spirit of hunting disappeared forever when his dear daughter Miriam married to a soldier and left him accompanying her husband. The agony of parting from his daughter changed him completely. He suffered a lot realizing the pangs of separation from his daughter. He always waited for the letter from his daughter hoping that she would at least write a letter to him someday. Therefore, he visited the post office every morning but so far, no letter had come. His failure to receive the letter did not kill his hope. He went home empty handed every day to return to the post office the next-day.

The post office staff poked fun and laughed at him calling him an old foolish man. They thought that he was a mad man who vainly waited for the letter from his daughter. Once, Ali did not come to the post office for several days. The post office staff was curious to know the reason. But after a few days, he came again. He had become weaker and breathed with great difficulty. There were clear signs of approaching end of his life.

Ali met the post master and asked about Miriam's letter. The post master was in a hurry and he behaved quite haughtily with the old man. Ali called a clerk and gave him five golden coins requesting him to deliver Miriam's letter to his grave if the letter arrived and if he was no more. Ali left him and he was not seen by anyone after that. One day the post master's daughter fell ill and he was eager to hear from her. He was also waiting for his daughter's letter. As he searched for his daughter's letter from the pile of letters, he saw a letter addressed to Coachman Ali.

Now he could realize his mistake. He felt that his rude behavior towards Ali was inhuman. He called Lakshmi Das, a clerk and asked him to find out Ali. The post master did not receive the letter from his own daughter, so he decided that he would hand over Ali's letter to him personally, the next morning. The next morning when he opened the door of the post office, he saw Ali leaning on his stick with tears in his eyes. There was a strange unearthly light in his eyes and the post master felt frightened suddenly, Ali disappeared and the post master was bewildered. Lakshmi Das told the post master that Ali had died three months back. That evening the post master himself went to Ali's grave and placed it on his tomb.

The post master's attitude changed. He was not sure whether Ali's spirit had come to the post office or it was his illusion only. But he realized that letters are not just pieces of papers but carriers of human hearts. He, for the first time, realized the essential human worth of a letter. He could understand Ali's plight because he too underwent the same agony of anxiety about his daughter's health. Empathy towards Ali mellowed his heart making him a better human being.

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### 7.3 TEXT OF THE STORY

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In the grey sky of early dawn stars still glowed, as happy memories light up a life that is nearing its close. 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. 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. 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. 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. 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. At the end of the garden stood a handsome building of the newest style, and the light gleamed threw 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 went in quietly and squatted on the veranda. The voices of two or three people busy and their routine work could be faintly heard threw 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. 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. 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.

"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 everyday 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.

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. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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.

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 everyday, and went away empty-handed.

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.

"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.

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.

"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 everyday?”

“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

“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. 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.

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. 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?”

“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 piece to anyone but her father?

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."

"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.

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. 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 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

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. 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. 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.

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."

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 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.

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.

"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. 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.

- Dhum Ketu

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## 7.4 KEY WORDS

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Dawn	: early morning
Grind	: crush, pulverize, reduce to small particles crushin
Distant	: far off
Pace	: walk at a steady speed, stride, tread
Support	: help, assist, holdup
Staff	: club



Behold	: see, look
Gleam	: shine, glimmer
Pilgrim	: a person who journeys to a sacred place
Jest	: to joke, to mock
Crouch	: adopt a position with bent knees and the upper body brought forward
Regiment	: a unit of an army
Cornfield	: a field where corn is being grown.
Reflect	: throw back, shine back, give back / to ponder
Infinite	: endless, limitless
Glimmer	: shine, gleam
Creak	: sharp sound, squeak, grate, groan
Briskly	: speedily, quickly
Relic	: artifact, historical object, antique
Declaim	: make a speech, give a lecture, make an oration
Exhausted	: tired, worn-out, fatigued
Anxiety	: worry, nervousness, apprehension
Muse	: to think over, to ponder
Astonishment	: surprise, amazement
Essential	: extremely important, basic, inherent, intrinsic
Reproach	: scold, rebuke, reprimand
Tortured	: pained, agonized, tormented
Remorse	: repentance, penitence, self- condemnation
Glow	: radiate, burn without flames

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## 7.5 SUMMARY OF THE STORY

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Dhumketu's moving story *The Letter* is about human emotions and their importance in human life. The central character of the story is Ali the Coachman who had been a skilled hunter in his younger days. He had a daughter named Miriam whom he loved profoundly. When she grew young, she was married to a soldier who served in the Punjab regiment. Miriam left Ali with her husband and there was no communication between the father and the daughter for many years. Ali waited for Miriam's letter and went to the post office every morning to inquire whether the letter from his daughter had arrived. For him the post office became a place of pilgrimage and every morning, he sat in a corner of the post office verandah. The postal staff made fun of him treating him like a madman. The postal clerk called out his name jokingly even though there was no letter for him. The staff of the post office discussed about lunatics and lunacy of different kinds.

For several days Ali did not come to the post office. Naturally, all employees of the post office were curious to know the reason. At last, he came but he

looked older and weaker. He could breathe with great difficulty. It seemed as if he were nearing the end of his life. When he asked the post master about Miriam's letter the post master behaved rudely with him. Ali met the clerk and gave him five gold coins telling him to deliver his letter to his grave if he was no more. He left and no one saw him after that.

One day, the post master's daughter fell ill and he was anxious to hear the news about her health. He deeply worried. He searched for the letter from his daughter from the pile of letters.

There was no letter from his daughter but he found a letter addressed to Coachman Ali. Now he realized his mistake. He felt remorse for his haughty behavior towards Ali. He called the postal clerk Lakshmi Das and asked him to find out Ali. He decided to hand over the letter personally to Ali.

Next morning when he opened the door of the post office, he saw Ali leaning on his stick with tears in his eyes. He saw unearthly light in his eyes. He was scared. And suddenly, Ali disappeared. When he asked Lakshmi Das, he told him that Ali had died three months back. The post master was bewildered and puzzled. He still had Miriam's letter in his hand. That evening, he went to the grave yard and placed Miriam's letter on Ali's grave.

The post master's attitude changed completely. He realized for the first time that letters were not only pieces of papers but carriers of emotions of human hearts. He understood the essential human worth of letters and the importance of human relationships.

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## 7.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE STORY

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'Dhumketu' was the pen name of Gaurishankar Joshi who was one of the pioneers of Gujarati short story. He was a prolific writer whose writings are characterized by poetic style, romanticism and highly effective depiction of human emotions. *The Letter* is one of his most popular short stories. It is the story about Coachman Ali who was once a skilled hunter. After the marriage of his only daughter Miriam, he realized the pain of separation from his daughter. He understood the meaning of love and separation and gave up hunting forever. He waited for a letter from his daughter with boundless patience visiting the post office of the town every morning. He walked to the building of the post office every day in all seasons and sat in a corner as the postal clerks read out the names of the addresses of the letters loudly. The postal clerks often teased him by announcing his name even though the letter had not arrived. He returned home with despair only to go to the post office the next day.

The post master behaved rudely with Ali calling him a mad man. However, when his own daughter fell ill, he waited for the news about his daughter's health. He was extremely worried and restless. Then he could realize Coachman Ali's miserable condition. When he saw Miriam's letter he was shocked. He decided to hand over the letter to Ali personally. His attitude towards letters changed for the first time. He realized that letters were not mere pieces of papers but they

carried human worth of a letter. He saw Ali's ghost who had come to collect his letter. Ali had died three months ago. The post master did not know about Ali's death but Lakshmi Das, the postal clerk told him that Ali was no more. The post master went to the grave yard and offered the letter of Miriam at the grave of Ali.

Dhumketu's narration is very captivating and effective. It keeps the readers fully engrossed till the story ends. His understanding of human emotions is quite profound. The story begins when Coachman Ali slowly plods on his way to the post office. It was a cold, chilly morning and people were still asleep. Ali is in tattered clothes and biting cold wind blows on the winter morning. He searched the post office and sit in a corner waiting for his daughter's letter. The postal staff often mocked at him calling him a mad man. They thought that Ali would never receive his daughter's letter.

In his younger days, Ali was a skilled hunter. He killed his prey and never missed his aim. When Miriam married and left him, his life changed completely. Miriam's husband was an army man and she left with him to Punjab the distant part of the country. Ali waited for her letter for years always visiting the post office. He grew older and his heart was filled with compassion for all living creature. He gave up hunting and began to admire green fields and beauty of nature. He felt that entire universe was built on love and separation. Loneliness filled his life but love for his daughter made him wait for her letter endlessly.

The postmaster behaved arrogantly ridiculing his foolish waiting. Ali remained absent from the post office for several days but one day, he came there breathing with great difficulty. He went straight to the post master and requested him to note down his address. The post master lost his temper and called him a pest. Ali left the post office with tears in his eyes. His patience was almost exhausted. Yet he hoped to hear something from Miriam.

Dhumketu describes the insensitive behavior of postal officials. Their inhuman attitude is criticized by the author in a subtle manner. The postal staff found Ali's presence irritating even though he never disturbed any one or complained about anything. After several days of absence, Ali came and offered five gold guineas to the clerk named Lakshmi Das. He requested him to forward his daughter Miriam's letter to his grave. Lakshmi Das was quite shocked but he put the money in his pocket without any emotion of compassion. He thought that Ali was a mad man who vainly hoped for the letter from his daughter. Just then the post master's daughter who lived in another town fell ill. He was waiting anxiously for the news about her health. He saw an envelope in the pile of letter addressed to Ali. The letter dropped from his hand as if he had undergone an electric shock. Soon there was a change in his heart. He could understand Ali's feelings as he too experienced the same kind of feelings. His hot temper disappeared and his heart was mellowed down.

The post master could not sleep that night due to anxiety about his daughter's ill health. He came to the post office at four O'clock in the morning hoping to receive some news from his daughter. At five O'clock, he heard the soft knock

on the door. He opened the door and saw Ali leaning on against his stick. His eyes were full of tears. The post master saw queer light in Ali's eyes. He looked unhealthy and the post master experienced a strange feeling of fear and astonishment. He handed over the letter to Ali quietly but soon he saw the letter lying on the floor near the door. The clerk and the postman told him that Ali had died three months ago. He was puzzled about his meeting with Ali. He was confused whether it was Ali's ghost or his illusion. He went to Ali's grave with Lakshmi Das that evening to offer the Miriam's letter at his grave. He placed the letter on his grave with profound sympathy for Ali. He could understand the agonies of a father's heart as he too was undergoing the same kind of pain.

Ali's character is full of feelings of love and separation. He is a simple, ordinary man but his heart is highly sensitive and soft. He is an epitome of patience and perseverance. The postmaster is an educated man but he is stubborn and without human emotions. However, when he experiences the same kind of pain of separation and anxiety, his heart changes completely. He treated people without emotions and sympathy. He saw letters as pieces of papers but he realized that letters are the carriers of human emotions and human relationships.

Dhumketu does not moralize directly but he provides important lessons through this story. However high the status of a person may be, one must treat elders with love and respect. In our society, elders are often neglected and treated as pests. One must remember that old age is inevitable part of life. One who is young and energetic today will turn into an old weakling when he is old.

Another important lesson is that God will treat you with love if you love other. How you treat others decides how God will treat you. If one wants to earn God's love and mercy one must be kind, loving and sympathetic towards, others. At the center of the story there is an irony that people do not understand the pain and sufferings of other people and treat them harshly. They forget that God is watching their behavior and attitude towards others. Love, compassion and kindness are the true human virtues that people should cultivate and practice in their lives. True religion is not just worship but love and compassion for all living creatures. It is an irony that educated people often become quite cruel and heartless. True education must focus not only on cultivation of skill and intelligence but also on the cultivation of love, sympathy and compassion.

In the short stories before Dhumketu, the life of the upper middle class and well-to-do people was the general subject matter in Gujarati short stories. Dhumketu broadened its horizons depicting the life of all the human beings of society. He drew incidents and characters from all walks of life ranging from history, mythology to the lives of common people. His favorite theme was the life of the artists who sacrificed their lives at the altar of art. He also represented the life of the poor, ordinary and illiterate people and their joys and sorrows. He depicted their passions, emotions love, longings, generosity, magnanimity and innate humanity.

Dhumketu set a new dimension to Gujarati short story by broadening the horizons of content and form of Gujarati short story. He filled his short stories with his creative upsurge and power of imagination. He added a new sensibility and a new vision of life in his short stories. Dhumketu portrayed the realities of life through his lively imagination, romantic idealism and vibrant, profound emotions. His style of writing is marked by racy, style and varied rhythm. His style is full of poetic qualities like figurative language, lucidity, rhythmic diction and vivid narration. “The Letter” is one of his most popular short stories that enthrall the readers by its artistic beauty and aesthetic exuberance.

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### **7.7 TONE OF THE SHORT STORY**

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The tone of the short-story *The Letter* by Dhumketu is loneliness and grief. The author portrays the character of Coachman Ali who was once a skilled hunter. He loved his daughter Miriam so deeply that when she left him after her marriage with a soldier, Ali felt utterly lonely and miserable. He waited for her letter for many years always visiting the post office in the morning. The letter never came and he died. The post master saw the letter addressed to Ali three months after Ali’s death. The post master, who had behaved very rudely with Ali, realized his mistake when he too had to wait for the news about his own daughter’s health. He went to Ali’s grave and placed the letter on it. The overall tone of the story is pain of separation and loneliness.

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### **7.8 THEME OF THE SHORT STORY**

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There are several important themes in the story *The Letter* by Dhumketu. The major theme of the story is love and the pain of separation. Ali the coachman is the central character of the story. He was a skilled hunter in his younger days. He killed his prey deftly never missing his aim. However his heart changed completely when his only daughter Miriam left him after her marriage with a soldier in Punjab. He waited for her letter for many years always visiting the post office like a place of worship. The letter never came till he lived. It arrived only after his death. The post master who had insulted and humiliated him realized his mistake and placed the letter on his grave.

Dhumketu provides cold, chilly weather as a back ground in the beginning of the story when Ali goes to the post office on a chilly, windy morning. Cold atmosphere symbolizes inhuman attitude of the postal staff and other people who always humiliated and teased him. They ignored the sufferings of the old Ali. The post master understands his agonies only when he too undergoes the same kind of pain of separation and anxiety.

Another theme of the story *The Letter* by Dhumketu is that human beings are transformed into better human beings by sufferings only. Ali was a cruel hunter who enjoyed killing birds and animals. But when he separated from his daughter, his heart was changed completely. His brutality turned into sensitivity. The post master who humiliated Ali realized his mistake when he too underwent the suffering and pain of separation from his daughter. He too had to wait for the news about his daughter’s health quite anxiously. In Gujarat, it is said that “Rambaan vagya hoy te jane” (only those who suffer pain know

what pain is) Sufferings alone make human beings more sensitive and sympathetic towards others.

Dhumketu also suggests that our good deeds or evil deeds are rewarded or punished during our life on this earth. He gives an important message that we live in an organized universe where our deeds are recorded and their knocking is done in the present life only. When one passes through sufferings one undergoes the change in heart. When suffering comes one repents for one's misdeeds. Repentance is like a holy stream that purities the person who repents. In this story, Ali is punished for killing innocent birds and animal and the post master is punished for his heartless behavior towards Ali. Poetic justice operates in this universe rewarding the good and punishing the Evil in all human beings.

Another important message that Dhumketu conveys through the story is that we should respect old and sick people. Old age is the part of life and no one can escape it. Therefore all people should love, help and respect the people. Helping the old and the needy is a great virtue which is rewarded by God during our present life. The law of Karma operates here and now. Heaven and hell exist here in our life and the world we live in.

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## **7.9 STYLES AND DICTION OF THE STORY**

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Dhumketu's style and diction are packed with emotions and imagination. His language is charged with poetic qualities. This description is vivid and highly picturesque. His understanding human emotions is remarkable. His expression of emotions is unique. The settings and characterization make his stories memorable. There is a profound philosophical message in the story. Dhumketu introduced new content and form in Gujarati short stories. His stories are marked by varied experience of life, creative urge and power of imagination. His style and diction are characterized by romantic qualities. His language is poetic and rhythmical. In this story he creates the atmosphere of loneliness and grief with symbolic language. He employs some figures of speech very effectively.

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## **7.10 TITLE OF THE STORY**

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The title of the story is *The Letter*. The title is very appropriate because the story is all about the letter for which coachman Ali waited all his life. Ali was a skilled hunter in his younger days but he gave up hunting after the marriage of his only daughter Miriam. Miriam left him and went to Punjab with her husband who was a soldier in the Indian Army. He understood the true meaning of love and separation. He waited for Miriam's letter visiting the post office every morning for five year. The postal staff mocked at him calling him a mad man.

The post master once behaved rudely with him but when his own daughter fell ill, he realized the pain of separation. His attitude towards letters changed until then, letters were just pieces of papers for him. He realized that letters contained throbbing hearts. He could understand the human worth of a letter. Hence the title is appropriate as it sensitizes the readers to the importance of a letter that carries the promise of hope, joy and love.

**Check Your Progress: 1**

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**7.11 ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS IN BRIEF.**

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1. What kind of life did Ali lead as a young man?

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2. Why did Ali give up hunting?

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3. Why did Ali visit the post office every morning?

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4. How did Ali's attitude change? Why?

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5. Describe the post master's behavior towards Ali?

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6 Why did the postal staff call Ali a madman?

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7 What did Ali request to Lakshmi Das? What did he offer to him?

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8 How was the postmaster a changed person in the end?

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9 “Ali’s patience was exhausted but not his faith” Explain

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10 What important lesson did the postmaster’s experience teach him?

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- 11 What did the postmaster realize at last? How?  
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- 12 Discuss briefly the lonely life of Coachman Ali?  
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- 13 What is the message of the story *The Letter* by Dhumketu?  
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14. What significant lesson does Dhumketu teach through the story *The Letter* ?  
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**Check Your Progress: 2**

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**7.12 CHOOSE APPROPRIATE OPTION FROM GIVEN BELOW.**

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1. Ali was a skilled \_\_\_\_\_  
 (a) painter (b) tailor  
 (c) potter (d) hunter

2. The post master called Ali
  - (a) an inset
  - (b) a fool
  - (c) a rascal
  - (d) a pest
3. Ali gave up hunting after
  - (a) an accident
  - (b) his daughter's marriage
  - (c) his daughter's death
  - (d) a bad experience
4. The story begins with Ali's walking towards.
  - (a) a temple
  - (b) a mosque
  - (c) a post office
  - (d) a railway station
5. For Ali the post office became a place of \_\_\_\_\_
  - (a) loneliness
  - (b) pilgrimage
  - (c) joy
  - (d) sorrow
6. Ali waited for a letter from
  - (a) his son
  - (b) his daughter
  - (c) his friend
  - (d) his brother
7. The post office is referred as a place of pilgrimage for Ali because.
  - (a) he visited it daily
  - (b) he came to pray for his daughter
  - (c) he thought that God would bless him if he went there
  - (d) he went there with faith and hope
8. The post master rudeness towards Ali displays
  - (a) his ego
  - (b) his lack of empathy
  - (c) Sensitivity
  - (d) preoccupation with the work
9. Ali did not come to the post office for several days as \_\_\_\_\_
  - (a) he had lost hope
  - (b) he was unwell
  - (c) he was busy
  - (d) he was upset by behavior of the post man.
10. The post master was anxious to receive the news about
  - (a) Miriam
  - (b) Ali
  - (c) his own daughter
  - (d) his own son
11. The post master realized his mistake when
  - (a) he underwent the agony of love and separation
  - (b) he underwent the pain of anger and sorrow
  - (c) he saw Ali's ghost
  - (d) he could not sleep for the whole night
12. Ali gave five guineas to Lakshmi Das and requested him \_\_\_\_\_
  - (a) to bury him when he died

- (b) to take him to hospital when he was sick
  - (c) to place Miriam's letter on his grave
  - (d) to place flowers on his grave
13. The main theme of the story *The Letter* is
- (a) loneliness and grief
  - (b) the change of heart
  - (c) insensitive postal official
  - (d) poverty and hunger
14. Dhumketu believed that human deeds are rewarded or punished
- (a) punished
  - (b) in the other world
  - (c) here and now only
  - (d) during the old age

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### 7.13 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we studied one of the most touching stories by Dhumketu. Dhumketu was one of the pioneers of Gujarati short stories. He was the first writer who explained the horizon of Gujarati short stories by introducing new form and content. He also introduced characters from lower strata of society in his short stories highlighting the fact that very often the poor and the illiterate people are better human beings than the rich and the educated. Dhumketu's style is poetic and captivating. His stories always carry messages of love, humanity and compassion. Literature is criticism of life and it teaches us how to live life meaningfully.

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### 7.14 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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2. Savishesha Parichay. Gaurishankar Joshi "Dhumketu" Gujarati Sahitya Parishad (in Gujarati) (2016)
3. Sisir Kumar Das. History of English Literature 1911-1956. Sahitya Akademi
4. Tankha Mandal part 1,2,3,4 (Collection of Short Stories by Dhumketu)
5. <https://successcds.net/english>
6. <https://brainly.in>. English
7. *The Letter*. Sodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in.

### Answers

### Check Your Progress 2

1. (d), 2. (d), 3. (b), 4. (c), 5. (b), 6. (b), 7. (a), 8. (b), 9. (b), 10. (c), 11. (a), 12. (c), 13. (a), 14. (c).