



INDIAN SCHOOL AL WADI AL KABIR  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH (2024-25)  
CLASS – XI  
QUESTION BANK ON A PHOTOGRAPH

**Four important points to remember:**

1. “An embodiment of time and timelessness” (the eternal state of the natural being and ephemeral state {Transitory /lasting for a very short time} of the humans)
2. ‘A melancholic poem (Sad)
3. A Nostalgic poem` (a feeling of pleasure and also slight sadness when you think about things that happened in the past:)
4. Three different phases of life (*Stanza 1*: a twelve-year-old girl with a pretty smiling face. *Stanza 2*: have a happy youthful laughter, before the poet was born. *Stanza 3*: the death of poet’s mother)

**MAIN POINTS**

1. The poet looks at a childhood photograph of her mother.
2. She had gone for a sea holiday with her two cousins Betty and Dolly
3. While they were paddling on the beach, their uncle photographed their sweet smile in a camera.
4. Both the cousins were holding the hands of her mother who was the oldest among the girls.
5. This was before the poet was born.
6. Time fled past since then and all those who are in the photograph underwent changes while the sea remained the same.
7. Her mother would look at the photograph after about twenty or thirty years and laugh at this photo nostalgically.
8. Now for the poet her mother’s laughter and her sea holiday is a thing of the past.
9. Her mother died about 12 years ago.
10. The silence of the photograph silences the poet.
11. She experiences great loss.

**Introduction:** The poem "A Photograph" by Shirley Toulson is a poignant reflection on the significance of a photograph and the memories it evokes. It explores themes of time, loss, and nostalgia, and highlights the enduring power of images to capture and preserve moments from the past.

**Key Point 1:** Evoke Memories: The poem emphasizes the ability of a photograph to evoke vivid memories and transport the viewer back in time. Toulson describes the image of her mother and her childhood friend captured in the photograph, which acts as a trigger for a flood of memories. The poem suggests that photographs have the power to bring back lost moments and make them feel alive again.

**Key Point 2:** Preserving the Past: "A Photograph" also highlights the importance of preserving the past through photographs. The poem mentions how the photograph is a silent witness, frozen in time, that captures a specific moment in the past. It serves as a tangible reminder of people, places, and events that may have changed or no longer exist. Through photographs, we can keep memories alive and pass them on to future generations.

**Key Point 3:** Emotional Connection: The emotional connection to the photograph is another significant aspect. Toulson expresses her longing to go back to the past and relive those moments captured in the photograph. The poem reflects on the bittersweet nostalgia that arises from looking at old photographs, as they can bring both joy and sadness. The photograph becomes a source of comfort and a way to hold on to cherished memories.

**Key Point 4:** Reflection on Time and Loss: The poem also prompts a reflection on the passage of time and the inevitability of loss. Toulson compares the frozen image in the photograph to the transience of life itself. The people in the photograph have aged, and some have passed away, highlighting the fleeting nature of existence. The poem encourages readers to appreciate the present and cherish the memories captured in photographs before they too become distant memories.

**Conclusion:** "A Photograph" emphasizes the importance of photographs in evoking memories, preserving the past, and creating an emotional connection. It serves as a reminder of the passage of time and the value of cherishing moments and loved ones. Through its introspective and nostalgic tone, the poem encourages readers to reflect on their own photographs and the memories they hold.

### **DETAILED EXPLANATION**

**1. Explain: 'The cardboard shows me how it was'.**

**Ans.** The photograph shows the narrator who it was that day.

**Poetic device:** allusion as the cardboard's lack of durability hints at the lack of permanence of human life

**2. Explain: 'All three stood still to smile through their hair'.**

**Ans.** All three of them stood smiling, their hair were flying over their faces (possibly tossed by the beach wind or water)

**Poetic device:** alliteration... stood still to smile

**3. Explain:**

*'And the sea, which appears to have changed less  
Washed their terribly transient feet.'*

**Ans.** The sea in the picture is still the same today and has changed very less. It seems to wash their feet which by nature, are transient because human life is short-lived as compared to nature.

Nature is perennial while human life is temporary or transient. The poet uses a transferred epithet (terribly transient feet) in order to make this comparison and highlight the terribly short-lived life of her mother.

**Poetic device:** Transferred Epithet. Human life itself is temporary not the feet. When the adjective for one noun like life is transferred to another noun like feet, it is called transferred epithet. It is also alliteration due to the repetition of the 't' sound (their terribly transient feet) but writing only alliteration as the poetic device will lead to a loss of marks)

#### 4. Explain:

**'The sea holiday  
was her past, mine is her laughter. Both wry  
With the laboured ease of loss'**

**Ans.** The sea holiday was remembered by her mother with a fondness as well as a sense of loss because that time would never return. Similarly, her laughter would never return to the narrator. The sea holiday was the narrator's mother's past and her mother's laughter is the narrator's past. Both these pasts are remembered with a difficult and yet easy sense of loss.

**Poetic device:** oxymoron

The coming together of two opposite ideas to describe the same entity. 'Laboured' and 'ease' are opposite words describing the same entity 'losses'. The loss of the holiday and the laughter was easy because these things have to be accepted as a part of life. They are merely a part of the past and cannot be brought back or relived. However, precisely because they cannot be relived, there will always be a tinge of difficulty letting them go completely. They will always be seen as loss.

The camera thus managed to capture a moment in time. It kept the memory of the mother and for the mother alive. The sea holiday brought a sad smile (wry) to the mother's face because she couldn't relive it but was glad that she once had. Similarly, thinking of her mother's laughter brought a sad smile to the poet's face because although that laughter was now gone, she was glad to have once had it in her life.

#### 5. Explain: 'that girl lived'.

**Ans.** Now, it has been twelve years since her mother passed away. The girl in the photograph seems like a different person altogether. That's why the poet has used the words, 'that girl'.

#### 6. Explain:

**'And of this circumstance  
There is nothing to say at all,  
Its silence silences.'**

**Ans.** Her mother has passed away leaving behind nothing but memories and photographs like this one. There is nothing to be said. It is a part of life and on thinking of it, one really has no words to express how one feels. The silence of the whole situation silences the poet and leaves her quiet.

**Poetic device:** alliteration and personification. The situation has been given the human quality of silence and the sound of 's' has been repeated)

#### 1. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:

*The cardboard shows me how it was  
When the two girl cousins went paddling  
Each one holding one of my mother's hands,  
And she the big girl- some twelve years or so.*

#### Q. What does the cardboard refer to?

**Ans.** The cardboard refers to the childhood photograph of her mother.

**Q. Who was the big girl and how old was she?**

**Ans.** The big girl was the poet's mother. She was then twelve years old.

**Q. How did the cousins go paddling with mother?**

**Ans.** The girl cousins went paddling with mother holding her hand.

**2. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:**

*All three stood still to smile through their hair  
At the uncle with the camera, A sweet face  
My mother's, that was before I was born*

**Q. Who does 'all three' refer to here?**

**Ans.** 'all three' refers to the poet's mother and her two cousins.

**Q. Where are they now?**

**Ans.** They have gone to the seashore. They are paddling in the water.

**Q. Why did they smile through their hair?**

**Ans.** They smiled through their hair because they were posing for a photograph.

**3. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:**

*..... A sweet face,  
My mother's, that was before I was born  
And the sea, which appears to have changed less  
Washed their terribly transient feet.*

**Q. Where was her mother?**

**Ans.** Her mother was on the sea shore with her cousins and posing for a photograph.

**Q. When did this incident take place?**

**Ans.** This incident took place when she was twelve years old.

**Q. How is the poet able to remember her mother's childhood?**

**Ans.** The poet is able to remember her mother's childhood when she looks into the photograph of her mother.

**Q. What has stood the onslaught of time and what has not?**

**Ans.** The sea has stood the onslaught of time. It is still the same. However, her mother and her cousins underwent changes. Her mother grew up to be an adult and now she is no more.

**4. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:**

*Some twenty- thirty- years later  
she'd laugh at the snapshot. "See Betty  
And Dolly," she'd say, "and look how they  
dressed us for the beach."*

**Q. Who would laugh at the snapshot after twenty – thirty years later?**

**Ans.** The poet's mother would laugh at the snapshot after twenty – thirty years later.

**Q. How did mother remember her past?**

**Ans.** Mother remembered her past with nostalgia.

**Q. Who were Betty and Dolly?**

**Ans.** Betty and Dolly were her cousins who had gone with her to the beach for paddling.

**5. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:**

.....*The sea holiday*  
*was her past, mine is her laughter. Both wry*  
*With the laboured ease of loss*

**Q. Who went for the sea holiday in the past?**

**Ans.** The poet's mother had gone for the sea holiday in the past when she was a young girl.

**Q. What does 'both' refer to?**

**Ans.** Both' refers to the poet's mother remembering her past sea holiday as well as the poet remembering her mother's laughter.

**Q. How does the poet feel when she remembers her mother?**

**Ans.** The poet experiences great sorrow when she remembers her mother who left for heavenly abode twelve years ago.

**Q. What does the poet compare her laughter to and why?**

**Ans.** The mother's laughter that used to echo in the house when she was alive has now become the poet's past. The comparison is given in order to remember the mother with fondness while looking at her photograph.

**6. Read the following extract and answer the questions that follow:**

*Now she's has been dead nearly as many years*  
*As that girl lived. And of this circumstance*  
*There is nothing to say at all,*  
*Its silence silences.*

**Q. When did the poet's mother die?**

**Ans.** The poet's mother died about twelve years ago.

**Q. What does the poet remember of that girl?**

**Ans.** She remembers how much her mother had changed from a young girl. She also remembers the sweet laughter of her mother.

**Q. Explain: 'Its silence silences.'**

**Ans.** The loss of her mother is too deep for the poet. Now she has nothing to say at all. The silence of the whole situation silences the poet and leaves her quiet.

**Q. What is 'this circumstance'?**

**Ans.** This circumstance means the death of her mother.

## Assertion and Reason Based

**Q1: Assertion: The photograph depicts three girls at the beach.**

**Reason: The poem describes a beach holiday.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) The assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) The assertion is false.

**Ans:** (b)

The assertion is true as the photograph shows three girls at the beach. However, the reason provided is not a correct explanation of the assertion.

**Q2: Assertion: The poet's mother would laugh at the snapshot.**

**Reason: The photograph is a source of sorrow for the poet's mother.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) The assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) The assertion is false.

**Ans:** (c)

The assertion is true as the poet's mother would laugh at the snapshot. However, the reason is false because the photograph does not bring sorrow but memories.

**Q3: Assertion: The sea in the photograph remains the same.**

**Reason: The sea touched the girls' feet in the picture.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) The assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) The assertion is false.

**Ans:** (a)

The assertion is true, and the reason is a correct explanation. The sea touched the girls' feet, symbolizing the permanence of the sea in contrast to the changing nature of people.

**Q4: Assertion: The photograph is framed with cardboard.**

**Reason: The photograph is old and faded.**

- (a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.
- (c) The assertion is true, but the reason is false.
- (d) The assertion is false.

**Ans:** (a)

The assertion is true, and the reason is a correct explanation. The photograph is framed with cardboard, and its age is implied by the faded appearance.

**Q5: Assertion: The poet's mother cannot express her grief.**

**Reason: The mother is alive but unable to speak.**

**(a) Both assertion and reason are true, and the reason is the correct explanation of the assertion.**

**(b) Both assertion and reason are true, but the reason is not the correct explanation of the assertion.**

**(c) The assertion is true, but the reason is false.**

**(d) The assertion is false.**

**Ans:** (c)

The assertion is true as the poet's mother cannot express her grief. However, the reason is false because the mother's inability to express grief is not due to being alive but rather due to her passing.

**Figure of speech for the poem Related: Poem 1: A Photograph by Shirley Toulson (Summary), CBSE Class 11 English Hornbill**

The poem "A Photograph" by Shirley Toulson is a nostalgic and emotional reflection on a black and white photograph of the speaker's mother and her friends. The photograph captures a moment frozen in time, and the speaker's memories and emotions are evoked by this image. Throughout the poem, Toulson uses various figures of speech to convey the speaker's feelings and to create a vivid picture of the past.

### **1. Metaphor**

Toulson uses several metaphors in the poem to describe the photograph and its contents. For example, she describes the image as "the past tense of a verb," suggesting that the moment captured in the photograph is now gone and can never be revisited. She also compares the photograph to a "paperweight," suggesting that it is heavy with the weight of memories and emotions.

### **2. Personification**

Toulson personifies the photograph itself, describing it as "speaking aloud" and "whispering." This personification creates a sense of intimacy between the speaker and the image, as if the photograph is a living thing that can communicate with her.

### **3. Hyperbole**

The final stanza of the poem contains a hyperbolic statement, as the speaker declares that the photograph "will never fade." This exaggeration highlights the speaker's intense emotional attachment to the image and the memories it represents.

### **4. Allusion**

Toulson also makes an allusion to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, who were separated by death. The speaker compares herself to Orpheus, who tried to bring his beloved Eurydice back from the dead, suggesting that she too is trying to capture the past and bring it back to life through the photograph.

Overall, Toulson uses these figures of speech to create a rich and evocative portrait of the speaker's memories and emotions. The use of metaphor, personification, hyperbole, and allusion helps to convey the depth of feeling associated with the photograph and the past it represents.

### **LONG ANSWER QUESTIONS: -**

#### **1. Justify the title of the poem, 'A Photograph'**

The poem, 'A Photograph' is composed in blank verse. (A blank verse is a poem with no rhyme, most frequently used in English dramatic, epic, and reflective verse.) The title of the poem is very appropriate as it reminds the poet of her mother. A photograph is something that captures a certain moment of someone's life. The person might change in course of time but the memories attached with the photograph are eternal. In this poem, the poet's mother is no more but the photograph makes her memories come alive. The mother's sweet face or her cousins dressed up for the beach have all changed with time but the moment captured in the photograph still gives happiness to the poet's mother when she views it twenty to thirty years later. The poet recalls her mother's old memories while looking at the photograph after the mother is no more.

#### **2. What impression do you form of the poetess and the poetess's mother after reading the poem 'A Photograph'?**

Ans. The poem presents the poet as a sensitive person who is quite affectionate towards her mother and is deeply attached to her. She loves 'her 'sweet' face and notes the changes in it as she advances in age. She remembers all the incidents connected with her life including her laughter on looking at the photograph. She finds it hard to bear her death. The pangs of separation stun her to speechlessness. The poetess's mother appears as a physically well-formed person with sweet face and beautiful smile. She has a friendly temperament and free mixing nature. She has great affection (or her two girl cousins and goes with them for a sea-holiday where they put on quaint dresses. She poses with them smilingly for a snap. Her laughter on seeing the dresses in the snap shows her fine temperament and good humour.

### **SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS:**

#### **1. Describe the three girls as they pose for the photograph?**

Answer: The three girls went to the sea beach and is photographed by their Uncle. The younger cousins were holding hands of the elder cousin (the poet's mother). They smiled through their hair as they stood still for the photograph.

#### **2. The sea 'appears to have changed less' in comparison to the three girls who enjoyed the sea holiday. Comment.**

Answer: The poet compares the mortal nature of human beings with the eternal nature of the sea or natural objects. With the passage of time, the poet's mother died but the vast sea has remained as it was since the photograph was taken.

#### **3. Why does the poet feel nostalgic?**

Answer: The poet sees an old photograph of her mother in which she was standing on the beach with her two cousins — Dolly and Betty. They were enjoying themselves. The photograph



captured her mother's sweet and smiling face. At that time, she was around twelve years old. The poet remembers how her mother used to laugh whenever she looked at that old photograph. But time has passed and now the poet has been left only with the memories of her mother. Thus, she feels nostalgic

#### **4. Comment on the tone of the poem.**

Answer: The tone of the poem is that of sadness. Shirley Toulson looks at an old photograph of her mother and is sadly reminded of her mother who is no more. She mentions about death of her mother indirectly only but this photograph has made her speechless and silent.

### **TEXTUAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**

#### **1. What does the word 'cardboard' denote in the poem? Why has this word been used?**

Ans: In the poem, the word 'cardboard' denotes the photograph pasted on a hard thick paper (a frame which supports the photograph). It is being used in the poem because the picture is very old and the cardboard was used as a photo frame to hold it.

#### **2. What has the camera captured?**

Ans: The camera has captured the poet's mother and her two cousins, Betty and Dolly, on the beach. They went paddling where her mother's uncle captured the photo. Her mother was around twelve years old and was in the middle. She was holding the hands of her cousins who were on either side of her. It was her mother's favourite past memory.

#### **3. What has not changed over the years? Does this suggest something to you?**

Ans: The lines 'And the sea, which appears to have changed less' depicts that the sea which touched her mother's feet is the one which has not changed over the years. Whereas, her mother and her cousins grew older. The sea symbolises eternity and immortality. Human being has a life span and has to die one day. Human life is not permanent.

#### **4. The poet's mother laughed at the snapshot. What did this laugh indicate?**

Ans: The poet's mother laughed at the snapshot recalling her favourite past memories. She looked back at the photograph and remembered how their parents would dress them up for the beach holiday. Her laugh indicated her remembering the innocent days and the nostalgia feeling. This 'laugh' indicated her joy at remembering an incident connected with her past life when she was quite young. Behind the laugh is also a feeling of pain that those days won't come back.

#### **5. What is the meaning of the line "Both wry with the laboured ease of loss."**

Ans: The sea holiday and the laughter of the poet's mother are incidents of the past. There is a sense of loss associated with them. The above lines mean that the poet's mother felt pain whenever she saw the old photograph because the innocent childhood days would never be back. Those are just the memories. While the poet has lost her mother twelve years ago and she misses her a lot and recalls her laughing and pointing out the outfits they used to wear at the beach holidays. Both of them lost something. This sense of loss is quite painful to bear.

**6. What does “this circumstance” refer to?**

Ans: This circumstance refers to the death of the poet’s mother. The words ‘this circumstance’ refers to the present situation of the poet which is the painful memories of her mother who had been deceased twelve years ago. While looking at the old photograph of her mother’s childhood makes her miss her. She remembers her laughing and how the photograph was her favourite past memory.

**7. The three stanzas depict three different phases. What are they?**

- Girlhood of the poet’s mother – The phase before the poet’s birth.
- 2. Middle age of the poet’s mother – The phase during the poet’s childhood.
- 3. Death of the poet’s mother – The phase after the death of the poet’s mother.

The first stanza depicts her mother’s childhood days when she was twelve years old or so. It talks about a photograph of her with her two cousins on a beach holiday. Her uncle took the photograph. Her mother changed over the years as she grew older. While the sea which touched their feet during that beach holiday hadn’t changed over the years.

In the second stanza, the poet talks about her childhood days when her mother used to look at the photograph with laughter and recalls everything mentioned in the first stanza.

In the last stanza, the poet shares that her mother is dead as many years ago as was her age in the photograph. She died twelve years ago. The poet is recalling her mother’s old memories while looking at the photograph. She is in pain and misses her deceased mother. She has no words to describe her grief.