**LM37 (I year) Reading Comprehension.**

There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown. He wants to *see* what is reaching towards him, and to be able to recognize or at least classify it. Man always tends to avoid physical contact with anything strange. In the dark, the fear of an unexpected touch can mount to panic. Even clothes give insufficient security: it is easy to tear them and pierce through to the naked, smooth, defenseless flesh of the victim.

All the distances which men create round themselves are dictated by this fear. They shut themselves in houses which no-one may enter, and only there feel some measure of security. The fear of burglars is not only the fear of being robbed, but also the fear of a sudden and unexpected clutch out of the darkness.

The repugnance to being touched remains with us when we go about among people; the way we move in a busy street, in restaurants, trains or buses, is governed by it. Even when we are standing next to them and are able to watch and examine them closely, we avoid actual contact if we can. If we do not avoid it, it is because we feel attracted to someone; and then it is we who make the approach.

The promptness with which apology is offered for an unintentional contact, the tension with which it is awaited, our violent and sometimes even physical reaction when it is not forthcoming, the antipathy and hatred we feel for the offender, even when we cannot be certain who it is—the whole knot of shifting and intensely sensitive reactions to an alien touch—proves that we are dealing here with a human propensity as deep-seated as it is alert and insidious; something which never leaves a man when he has once established the boundaries of his personality. Even in sleep, when he is far more unguarded, he can all too easily be disturbed by a touch.

It is only in a crowd that man can become free of this fear of being touched. That is the only situation in which the fear changes into its opposite. The crowd he needs is the dense crowd, in which body is pressed to body; a crowd, too, whose psychical constitution is also dense, or compact, so that he no longer notices who it is that presses against him. As soon as a man has surrendered himself to the crowd, he ceases to fear its touch (ideally, all are equal there; no distinctions count, not even that of sex). The man pressed against him is the same as himself. He feels him as he feels himself. Suddenly it is as though everything were happening in one and the same body. This is perhaps one of the reasons why a crowd seeks to close in on itself: it wants to rid each individual as completely as possible of the fear of being touched. The more fiercely people press together, the more certain they feel that they do not fear each other. This reversal of the fear of being touched belongs to the nature of crowds. The feeling of relief is most striking where the density of the crowd is greatest.

from *Crowds and Power* by Elias Canetti

*Answer the following questions in your own words as far as possible*:

1.Why, according to the writer, do we fear the touch of the unknown?

2.What are the various situations and contexts in which a person my feel this fear?

3. How do we show we dislike being touched in public?

4. Why is this fear of touch so ‘deep-seated, alert and insidious’?

5.When do we become free of this fear of being touched, and why?

6a) If, by chance, someone does touch us we feel i) disgusted by this ii) hostile to them iii) shocked by this iv) surprised by this

b) “Man always tends to avoid physical contact with anything strange.” Rewrite:

Physical contact……

c) “The antipathy and hatred we feel for the offender proves that we are dealing here with a human propensity as deep-seated as it is alert and insidious”. Rewrite beginning with ‘what’ for emphasis:

What…………………………..

d) “The fear of burglars is not only the fear of being robbed, but also the fear of a sudden and unexpected clutch out of the darkness.”

Not only…………………………………….

e) The way we feel in a crowd is presented as a(n):

i) absurdity ii) logical conclusion iii) opposite iv) paradox