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WOMEN'S WRITING

B.E.G.C.-111

B.A. English (Hons.) - 5th Semester

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By: Kshiyama Sagar Mehier



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**Sample Preview
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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

WOMEN'S WRITING

B.E.G.C.-111

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks : 100

Note: This question paper is split up into three sections – A, B and C. All sections are compulsory. There is internal choice in each section.

SECTION-A

Q. 1. Explain with reference to the context of the following:

- (a) I measure every Grief I meet
With narrow, probing, eyes–
I wonder if it weighs like Mine–
Or has an Easier size.

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from 'I Measure Every Grief I Meet' by Emily Dickinson.

Explanation: The first person "I" pronoun is used to begin the poem. The speaker claims that whenever she encounters mourning people, she examines them thoroughly and compares their suffering to her own to see whether it is more tolerable. She wonders if other bereaved people experience this anguish in the same way because she feels as if she has been carrying it for a very long time. She then considers whether they ever considered suicide or death while they were in this life-or-death circumstance. She has observed some departed individuals who make an effort to revive their smile, but she finds that this grin to be insufficiently convincing.

- (b) It voices my joys, my longings, my
Hopes, and if is useful to me as cawing
Is to crows or roaring to the lions, it
Is human speech, the speech of the mind
that is
Here and not there, a mind that sees and
hears and is aware.

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from Kamla Das's *An Introduction*.

Explanation: She rather wants a national identity as she says: "I am Indian, very brown in colour, born in Malabar". The poet also boasts of her linguistic proficiency. "I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one." Her Indian identity and linguistic ability is emphasized to reinforce her claim of writing in English. According to the poet, the language is just as human as the narrator. She makes a compelling argument for using English by saying that it is as helpful to her as cawing is to birds or roaring is to

lions. She speaks English so effortlessly that she can express her "joys," "longings," and "hopes" in it. The narrator elaborates on her thesis by using a number of illustrations to show what English writing is not like. She says that English "is not deaf, blind speech"/"Of trees in storms or of monsoon clouds or of rain or the/ Incoherent mutterings of the blazing funeral pyre".

The poem also talks of the narrator's early marriage and her consequent psychological hurt: "He drew a youth of sixteen into the/ Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten./The weight of my breast and womb crushed me/I shank pitifully". The poet switches to western attire as a form of protest. Strong anger was generated among her family and well-wishers as a result of her open revolt. The poet's clever use of word choice, sentence structure, and tone perfectly conveys their quick reflexes. The poem then shifts to a different narrative in which Kamala Das suggests her ideal Manwoman connection. The following two paragraphs very effectively illustrate how men and women behave sexually through the use of lovely visuals that act as objective correlatives. "The hungry haste/of rivers and the ocean's tireless/waiting" represent the psychological states of men and women respectively.

- (c) Her dream, like the dreams of a dozen
other women.

But she woke up before the dream began.
And then she never fell asleep again.

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Her Dream* by Indira Sant.

Explanation: Every woman has dreams, and not just married women, as stated in the poem "Her Dream," which makes it realistic. This woman is an example of a typical Indian widow who has lost her identity as a result of her husband's passing. She loses her social standing and is unable to enjoy life's simple pleasures without a husband. The poet lists the dreams of a widow. Her existence is a long stretch

of hopelessness with no peace or tranquilly. The importance of the family in a woman's life is derived from this involvement. However, without a husband, a woman is without something and cannot find fulfilment in carrying out domestic duties since she lacks a partner who will value her and make her feel special. While her husband supports her well-being, a married woman takes care of everything.

(d) **See how the letters move
in the eyes of the mind,
then leap over, back to the wall
from the page of Chaitanya Bhagavata
you tone from the book
when no one was looking.**

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Don't Wash* by Rasha Sundari Debi.

Explanation: There is a superstitious notion that if a woman penned the akshara, it would lose its holiness and force. Writing on the wall was done "furtively," yet this wasn't a cowardly act; it took commitment, bravery, and preparation. Rasha Sundari's inner self would have been stifled if she had tried to erase the memory of this action because it was this writing that had given significance to her dull and ordinary life. The poet recognises how diligently and diligently she worked to memorise the alphabet.

She labouriously performed all of her domestic duties, including "wash rice, fish, veggies... peel, cut, bake, stir and cook," while also working extra hard to learn the alphabet by scrawling on the kitchen walls. She persisted in her endeavours despite all the obstacles in her way, expanding her imagination and letting her brain "take wings." She was able to comprehend the complex world and express herself in a variety of ways after learning to read and write. She was able to soar boldly over the sky like a bird with powerful wings.

(e) **Then....I wore a shirt and my
Brother's trousers, cut my hair short and
ignored
My womanliness. Dress in sarees, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer,
be cook,
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in.**

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from Kamla Das's *An Introduction*.

Explanation: The poem also talks of the narrator's early marriage and her consequent psychological hurt: "He drew a youth of sixteen into the/ Bedroom and closed the door. He did not beat me/ But my sad woman-body felt so beaten./The weight of my breast and womb crushed me/I shank pitifully". The poet switches to western attire as a form of protest. Strong anger was generated among her family and

well-wishers as a result of her open revolt. The poet's clever use of word choice, sentence structure, and tone perfectly conveys their quick reflexes. The poem then shifts to a different narrative in which Kamala Das suggests her ideal Manwoman connection. The following two paragraphs very effectively illustrate how men and women behave sexually through the use of lovely visuals that act as objective correlatives. "The hungry haste/of rivers and the ocean's tireless/ waiting" represent the psychological states of men and women respectively.

SECTION-B

Note: Answer the following questions:

Q. 2. Discuss some of the themes that women take up in their writings. Give examples.

Ans. See Chapter-1, Page No. 7, Q. No. 3.

Q. 3. What were Mary Wollstonecraft's views with regard to Education?

Ans. See Chapter-2, Page No. 17, 'Inadequate Education System'.

Q. 4. Do you agree with the view that the Chandrabati Ramayana is a silenced text? Why?

Ans. See Chapter-3, Page No. 27, Q. No. 2 and Page No. 32, Q. No. 7.

Q. 5. Describe Pandita Ramabai's struggle to find and speak about truth in various aspects of society.

Ans. See Chapter-4, Page No. 37, 'Analysis'.

Q. 6. Comment on the relationship between Rosemary and her husband in 'A Cup of Tea'.

Ans. See Chapter-9, Page No. 81, 'Plot'.

SECTION-C

Q. 7. What do Angela's diaries reveal about her in 'The Legacy'? Illustrate.

Ans. See Chapter-10, Page No. 91, 'Gilbert Clandon' and Page No. 92, Q. No. 2.

Q. 8. Discuss the issues of mental illness and psychological stress as brought out in 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'

Ans. See Chapter-11, Page No. 104, Q. No. 5 and Page No. 105, Q. No. 6.

Q. 9. How does 'A Kitchen in the Corner of the House' bring out the power dynamics in a household? Give examples.

Ans. See Chapter-12, Page No. 110, 'Symbolic Importance of the Kitchen'.

Q. 10. "The predominant issue and theme in Sunlight On A Broken Column emerges from the situations that focus on a women caught in the crisis of a transitional society." Elaborate.

Ans. See Chapter-15, Page No. 150, Q. No. 1 and Page No. 151, Q. No. 3 and Q. No. 4.

Sample Preview of The Chapter

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WOMEN'S WRITING

BLOCK-1: NON-FICTIONAL PROSE

Introduction to Women's Writing



INTRODUCTION

The literary analysis that is influenced by feminism, feminist theory, and/or feminist politics is known as feminist literary criticism. The method has changed how literary text analysis is done.

A text, whether written by a woman or a man, is evaluated by feminist critique for both its literary merit and how well it portrays women characters. Existing literary canons are evaluated in light of patriarchal ideology, political viewpoints, and value systems using feminist literary criticism. With a specific focus on the investigation of how the literary devices used by female writers deviate from the guidelines of the male canon, it has also influenced the concurrent issues of publishing and critical reception. Women's writing has advanced due to the development of feminist thought. The movement was launched in the 18th century when Mary Wollstonecraft released *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Inspired by the ideas of equality and liberty that the French Revolution symbolized, Wollstonecraft was one of the first advocates of gender equality. She placed a strong focus on female education. In the US, Margaret Fuller echoed Wollstonecraft's efforts by focusing on the importance of educating women. But unlike Wollstonecraft, she espoused the idea of non-specific gender roles and pushed for equality for women and African-Americans. Virginia Woolf is another feminist. Feminist thinkers are still influenced by her ideas today. She was a pioneer in the "androgynous" creative mind movement. She was also the first thinker to advocate for a reading style that was woman-centric, allowing women to read as women without having to adhere to male aesthetic and value standards.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

THE WAVES OF FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

Three waves can be identified in the development of feminism. The suffragette movement, which sought to achieve gender equality in the West, was a defining feature of the first wave, which spanned from the 1830s to the 1920s. The women activists of the era also showed their concern for problems like chattel marriage resistance and property rights. Evangelical feminism, a significant component of the first wave of feminism, aimed to elevate individuals who were seen as morally "fallen." *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and *The Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen are among the first-wave works that address the constrictive and oppressive roles that women faced in Victorian society. The publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 marked the beginning of the second wave of feminism. The catchphrase of this movement was "the personal is the political," meaning that the problems women were facing on a personal level were actually political and structural in nature. The literary world saw the emergence of writers like Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Margaret Drabble, Angela Carter, and Muriel Spark who vividly depicted the social and private lives of women. In their artwork, they portrayed freed women who could carve out a niche for themselves in both their personal and professional life. The 1990s saw the beginning of the third wave of feminism, which is still going strong today. The writings of theorists like Judith Butler,

Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Luce Irigaray served as the foundation for this wave.

Third wave feminism, which draws heavily on a post-structuralist understanding of both gender and sexuality, also criticises what it sees as the shortcomings of the first wave. Gender had changed from being a fixed or unchanging categorization to one that was flexible, contingent, negotiable, and in flux. The study of feminism now includes additional analytical categories such as class, caste, race, and ethnicity. Third-wave feminism also responds to the disintegration of the category of “women” by focusing on individual narratives of many women rather than the canonical narratives of the middle-class, White women, in a paradigmatic shift in feminist criticism. The third wave’s well-known female writers included Margaret Atwood, Jeanette Winterson, Joyce Carol Oates, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Zadie Smith.

WOMEN’S WRITING:

TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT

Feminists started to examine and recognise the psychological, socio-cultural, and political repercussions of gender norms as a social constructionist concept of gender took shape. Gerda Lerner says women writers deal with conflicted allegiances and dual consciousnesses, both within and outside of a social and cultural consensus. Women writers faced a conundrum as a result of the tendency to view particular behaviours and actions as being typical to a particular gender: they were expected to confine their writing to those topics in which they had first-hand experience (i.e., the domestic sphere), but in a rather clever distortion of reason, when they did so, they were accused of being self-serving and parochial. As Margaret Atwood had said “when a man writes about things like doing the dishes, it’s realism; when a woman does, it’s an unfortunate feminine genetic limitation”. Women authors were both women and writers to their contemporaries in the 19th century. If a woman writer wanted to be judged simply on the originality of her writing and not just on how well she wrote compared to other women writers of her era, she frequently had to use a male pen name. Women writers were perpetually frustrated by the knowledge that their literary genius would be overlooked because of the numerous pre-conceptions associated with their gender. Women authors played a significant part in reversing these ramifications. Since the previous few decades, women’s literature has increasingly become recognised as a unique literary tradition.

Due to this trend, a broad range of literary studies have emerged that focus only on works by women. However, other critics disagree with the use of the term “women’s writing,” arguing that it elevates an author’s gender above her literary works and virtually implies that the privilege is intended to make up for the injustices they have experienced. However, while being historically marginalised by men, women have questioned both traditionalised views of what constitutes literature and the mechanisms of power and domination. Women’s writing is a distinct genre that stands apart from men’s writing in part due to the atypical literary modes, narrative strategies, diction, and style they employed. Thus, the written word inexorably evolved into a tool for empowering women. The promise to convey and value women’s own perspectives about themselves and the world around them is one of the most well-known topics in women’s literature. Women’s writing has bravely advanced over time toward an examination of a woman’s identity. Women writers have consistently worked toward a literature that is anchored in the “inner space,” and “a room of one’s own” was a significant symbol of the same in their rejection of a masculine literary tradition.

Women’s Writing: Locating the Genre

Women authors including Mary Shelley, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Kate Chopin, Elizabeth Gaskell, Emily Bronte, and Maria Edgeworth created works that were revolutionary for their day in the 19th century England. For the past few decades, these works have been regarded as foreshadowing the challenges and themes of contemporary feminist inquiry. The writings of American novelists from the same era such Louisa May Allcot, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Winifred Holtby were even more innovative. The main thematic issue of the nineteenth century, according to Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar’s key work on nineteenth-century women novelists, was “the woman’s struggle for self-definition.”

Women authors who penned novels and other prose works experimented with different storytelling techniques and styles during the turn of the 20th century. Disjointed, non-linear narratives with analepsis and prolepsis directly addressed formerly taboo topics like women’s sexual urges, sexual violence, same-sex desire, and the psychology of women. The unfulfilling nature of the conventional roles of a daughter, wife, and mother was first explored by authors, as well as the fact that marriage and love engagements are not the only things women can hope for. Modern female

INTRODUCTION TO WOMEN'S WRITING / 3

writers have, in the words of Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “been particularly concerned in the woman alone.

The husbands and lovers of their heroines play an obvious supporting role, but not in a trivialized way or as underdeveloped characters (on the contrary, these men are well-delineated), but rather as distinct figures among many in the challenging lives of battling women. Women poets of the era, like their prosodic counterparts, embraced a new literary mode and imbued their poems with distinctive stylistic and structural features, challenging the conventions of old literary forms through the physical structure of the poem. Poets like Marianne Moore and Hilda Doolittle in America and Carol Rumens and Anna Wickham in England have seriously challenged established literary norms.

They had to carefully avoid being ‘personal’ rather than universal because they had to rely on mainstream literary circles for getting published and being held in esteem, thus even if they wrote in a distinctive style as they could, they were treading on thin ice. But as time went on, financially independent women writers launched their own printing presses, journals, and magazines. African-American literature produced a significant amount of work during the twentieth century. Different issues than those of the White writers of the time distinguished the texts of African-American authors.

Racial injustice, severe beauty standards, desire, maternity, interpersonal relationships, misogyny, gender roles, violence, incest, community and society, and God were all topics that authors like: Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Zora Neale Hurston addressed in their writing. Toni Cade Bambara and Gloria Naylor, among a generation of other young novelists, were influenced by these pioneers of Black women’s literature. Black Feminism claimed that feminist arguments must take race into account as an analytical category. Black feminist philosophy was pioneered by thinkers like Patricia Hill Collins, Hortense Spillers, and Hazel Carby. Shortly after, postcolonial feminism took a step further and expanded the concerns of Black feminists to include problems encountered by Chicana and Asian American women as well as women from other cultures and countries.

Perspectives in Feminist Thought

There has been an explosion of critical works analysing women’s literature in light of the expanding body of feminist theory from the 1970s and 1980s.

With the writings of Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, French feminism in particular developed during the 1970s and has thoroughly investigated female subjectivity. Cixous, who drew on psychoanalysis, argued that the only way to move past the literary “phallogocentrism” that exists was to abolish the linguistic hierarchies that exist in androcentric societies. Instead of thinking of men and women as A and A–, she thought of them as A and B, or as separate creatures. Women would stop being the “other” to men. Similar to Kristeva, she proposed that because women were unable to actively participate in the “symbolic order,” their works represented themselves through poetic language known as “genotexts,” which elude linguistic conventions. One of the key advancements in feminist theory throughout the 1980s was the understanding that language is a tool of oppression in the hands of patriarchy. Many feminists have said that language has the ability to manipulate social interactions in ways that we are unaware of, masking patriarchal ideals with deceptive language.

In her book *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender reflected extensively on how, in contrast to the declarative and strong style of men’s writing, women’s writing was typically submissive and apologetic in tone. Since then, many feminists have claimed that language possesses a power that permits it to regulate social interactions in ways that we are unaware of. Spender continues by highlighting the fact that masculine word forms typically have more positive connotations than their feminine equivalents. To illustrate this point, she uses the word pair master-mistress as an example. Since language is inherently biased in favour of men, it was evident that women writers needed to create “their own” language. The “écriture féminine,” as Helene Cixous referred to it in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, is reflected in writers from the last three decades of the 20th century, including Jeanette Winterson, Angela Carter, Fay Weldon, and Kathy Acker. Their writings are a reflection of a feminine consciousness, which results in styles, subjects, language, and tropes that are fundamentally different from those used by male authors. It became fashionable to use mystic language, puns, word games, and even graphic modifications like hyphens and parenthesis.

Their personalities were more fluid and elusive to define. For instance, Jeanette Winterson developed gender-fluid characters; Angela Carter attempted to challenge patriarchy through the use of magical

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realism, the portrayal of absent father figures, and the emphasis on mother-daughter connections. In actuality, these writers' and critics' emphasis on gender fluidity paved the way for the gender-queer theories of the twenty-first century. Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* was another important work of the 1970s. Along with outlining the recurring themes, tropes, symbols, and styles in women's literature, Showalter successfully split the feminist movement's literary culture into three phases: the feminine, the feminist, and the female. In order to emphasise the use of a feminist framework for the examination of women's writing, she also developed the word "gynocriticism."

A few additional books, like Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan, Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, and Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, have inspired writing written by women all around the world. The goal of feminist literary criticism is to challenge the validity of masculine literary aesthetics and values that both male and female writers have adopted.

In the words of Annette Kolodny's, it pays "attentiveness to the ways in which primarily male structures of power are inscribed (or encoded) within our literary inheritance: the consequences of that encoding for women – as characters, as readers, and as writers". The majority of feminists concur that literature has a significant role in the maintenance of socially unequal power relations. Literary writings normalise stereotyped portrayals of women, which typically fall into two categories: the angelic mother and the seductive predator, making them worthy and acceptable for females who are exposed to such texts. Some of feminists' sharpest criticism has focused on how the female body is viewed, in particular, on ideas of what the ideal "feminine" body should resemble, appropriate feminine behaviours that the body should perform, and her reproductive nature. In actuality, a body becomes gendered through the repeated execution of certain roles outlined by a culture-specific script – a concept that Judith Butler has extensively discussed. As a result, feminist philosophers have conducted a significant amount of research in the area of "ethics of embodiment." Thus, failure to conform to a particular gender, class, race, or other social construct is typically viewed as a transgression that ultimately marks individuals for subjugation and/or ostracism. One such philosopher, Gail Weiss points to specific feminist philosophers, critical race scholars, and

disability theorists who ... illustrate, and ultimately combat, the insidious ways in which sexism, racism, and "compulsory able-bodiedness", impoverish the lived experience of both oppressors and the oppressed, largely by pre-determining the meaning of their bodily interactions in accordance with institutionalized cultural expectations and norms.

WOMEN'S WRITING: THE INDIAN CONTEXT

The necessity for feminist and cultural theories that could address the needs of particular groups of women (intersectional feminism), such as Blacks, Indians, lower-class women, etc., was keenly felt as cultural norms grew in importance within feminist inquiry. The main goal became to avoid essentialism and the simplifying of women's experiences. The development of Indian feminism is unmistakably influenced by Western feminism, although first-world countries' critical theories are completely disconnected from the realities of grassroots women's organisations. "Feminism without Borders" is a movement that aims to broaden the definition of feminism and devalue feminist theories developed and created by White, middle-class women.

Thus, it underlines the significance of preserving cultural specificity while discussing women's experiences. As an illustration, feminists in 19th century Britain and America tackled issues including the right to vote, freedom from corsets, and the ability to pursue meaningful careers outside of the house. Around the same time, feminism in India included campaigns for the repeal of the sati custom, child marriage, female infanticide, limitations on women's access to higher education, inheritance laws, etc. Even then, the efforts at reformation tended to be concentrated among women from the upper class, who were mainly Brahminical. Things like women's health, domestic violence, wage laws, and the rights of tribal and Dalit women weren't addressed until much later.

The fact that there is such a broad gap in the topics being addressed says a lot about the importance of women's literature and culture-specific feminism. For a very long time, male writers dominated the Indian subcontinent's literary scene, with women emerging later and winning popularity and praise from critics even later. When viewed from a feminist perspective, the cliché of having a voice and being taken seriously typically serves as a representation of agency, a quality that was previously thought of as a masculine one. In an effort to allow their female characters the freedom