

**ST JOSEPH’S UNIVERSITY, BENGALURU -27**

**II SEMESTER BA/BCom/BSc/BCA**

**END SEMESTER EXAMINATION: APRIL 2024**

**(Examination conducted in May/June 2024)**

**GE 221: GENERAL ENGLISH**

**(For current batch students only)**

**Time: 2 Hours Max Marks: 60**

**This paper contains SEVEN printed pages and THREE themes.**

**Instructions:**

1. **Answer ONLY ONE of the themes given.**
2. **Mention the theme you have selected as the title in your answer booklet.**
3. **DO NOT answer questions from different themes.**
4. **You are allowed to use a dictionary during this examination.**
5. **You will be penalized for lifting sentences directly from the passage.**
6. **Kindly adhere to the prescribed word limit.**

**THEME-1**

1. **Read the following extract from the short story, titled, ‘Twenty Rupees and an Air-conditioner’ by Arunima Mazumdar.**

My good friend Balram is a rickshaw puller. He loves his beedi more than his wife, just like the others in his clan of work. In fact, if you look closely, you’ll notice that he resembles the others. They all have sun-burnt skin and they all wear loose and tattered pants, the original colours of which are long gone. And they are all christened as ‘bhaiyas’ by young girls and elderly women alike, much to their dislike. Some of them prefer to cover their heads with a *gamcha* as they wait impatiently for a swarm of people darting out of the station in the relentless afternoon sun. Others prefer a siesta under a tree shade.

Balram, however, doesn’t need a tree shade to rest and neither does he wait in anticipation for a passenger. He likes to park his three-wheeled chariot outside a local restaurant and spend the afternoon on its porch, reading the day’s newspaper. Yes, he can read but that’s not the point. Balram played it by convincing Singh uncle, the owner of ‘Singh Uncle’s’, to let him sit outside the eatery for the few, hot afternoon hours. Singh Uncle’s eatery is popular not because it has cheap pastries and patties on offer but because the meek little eatery boasts of an air-conditioned ambience, something that only the bigwigs of the restaurant business can afford.

“An intelligent initiative”, so says everyone and I agree too but I miss the point of his ‘intelligence’ when I see no door at the entrance. To cut on the cost, Singh Uncle had avoided investing in a wooden door and settled only for an unyielding, iron shutter that he pulls with all his might at 11pm every night. It was only a month after he got the air-conditioner installed that he grasped the futility of the new electronic device, and of course, the inevitability of a door. But it was too late to amend the hinges and he found yet another ‘intelligent’ solution in two thick see-through plastic sheets, parted from the middle, hanging at the doorway. To his satisfaction, they were almost capable of barring the expensive, cool breeze from filtering out.

“But can a flimsy plastic sheet do what a door can do?” Balram asked me. I looked at him confused. He put his arm on my shoulder and spoke again, this time clarifying his plan to convince me better, “Look over there. The plastic sheet takes to the air every time there’s a gush of wind or whenever someone walks in or out of the shop. I have experienced it, the whiff of electrically cooled air, in that brief moment”. And so, he sits outside ‘Singh Uncle’s’ every afternoon, reading his favourite page of the newspaper and occasionally wincing at me.

But a businessman is a businessman after all. Uncle Singh would never do a favour on the house. He allowed Balram to spend his afternoons there but remembered to charge a per day fee in return. No, he wasn’t money minded and hence he never suggested a monetary compensation, lest it questioned his kind repute. He instead appointed Balram the job of bringing his wife home from the nearby school, needless to say, without any charge. So, every afternoon, Sukhi bhabhi, the Matron in Shiksha Bharti Vidyalaya would hoard herself on Balram’s rickshaw seat and enjoy a free ride home.

“They think the favour-barter is fair but it is not so my friend”, rues Balram. I throw a questioning glance at him and he knows I am intrigued. So, he continues, “The school is about 2 kilometres away from their house and ideally twenty rupees is what I charge for a single person for that long a distance. But have you estimated the weight on that woman? She’s nothing less than 80 kgs; who knows may be even more”.

So, you see it is simple math; twenty rupees to escape the afternoon for an air-conditioned porch.

Wondering who I am who knows all secrets of his trade? Well, I occupy the small corner of the pavement facing ‘Uncle Singh’s’, where I sit and boil the sugary syrup every day. They call me the chai waala.

**Glossary:**

*Beedi-* a type of cheap cigarette made of unprocessed tobacco wrapped in leaves

*Bhaiya-* Older brother

*Gamcha-* towel

*Bhabhi-* Sister-in-law

*Chai waala-* roadside tea seller

**I.A. Answer the following questions in about 5 sentences each: (4x5=20)**

1. Why do you think the rickshaw-pullers object to the term ‘bhaiya’?
2. Among the characters mentioned in the story, who do you think has the best business sense? Why?
3. Is there anything in the story that Balram does which makes him an unusual rickshaw puller? Justify your answer.
4. Why do you think the chai waala refers to his tea as “sugary syrup”? Does he like the tea that he makes and sells?

**I.B. Answer the following in about 150 words each: (2X10=20)**

1. Examine the friendship between Balram and the chai waala. What seems to be holding it together?
2. Are there terms similar to "bhaiya" that you have heard people use in Bangalore or in other cities? What are some of the acceptable ways of addressing a stranger in your language?

**I.C. Answer any ONE of the following in about 250 words: (1X20=20)**

1. What are some of the inventive solutions you have seen people come up with to beat the heat during summer?
2. Have you experienced a summer vacation that you would describe as ‘unforgettable’? Write about it for a future generation that may not have the luxury of a summer break.

**THEME 2**

**II. Read this short story, titled, ‘A Strange Story’ by O Henry.**

In the northern part of Austin there once dwelt an honest family by the name of Smothers. The family consisted of John Smothers, his wife, himself, their little daughter, five years of age, and her parents, making six people toward the population of the city when counted for a special write-up, but only three by actual count.

One night after supper the little girl was seized with a severe colic, and John Smothers hurried down town to get some medicine.

He never came back.

The little girl recovered and in time grew up to womanhood.

The mother grieved very much over her husband's disappearance, and it was nearly three months before she married again, and moved to San Antonio.

The little girl also married in time, and after a few years had rolled around, she also had a little girl five years of age.

She still lived in the same house where they dwelt when her father had left and never returned.

One night by a remarkable coincidence her little girl was taken with cramp colic on the anniversary of the disappearance of John Smothers, who would now have been her grandfather if he had been alive and had a steady job.

"I will go downtown and get some medicine for her," said John Smith (for it was none other than he whom she had married).

"No, no, dear John," cried his wife. "You, too, might disappear forever, and then forget to come back."

So John Smith did not go, and together they sat by the bedside of little Pansy (for that was Pansy's name).

After a little Pansy seemed to grow worse, and John Smith again attempted to go for medicine, but his wife would not let him.

Suddenly the door opened, and an old man, stooped and bent, with long white hair, entered the room.

"Hello, here is grandpa," said Pansy. She had recognized him before any of the others.

The old man drew a bottle of medicine from his pocket and gave Pansy a spoonful.

She got well immediately.

"I was a little late," said John Smothers, "as I waited for a street car."

**II.A Answer the questions that follow in about 5 sentences each: (4x5=20)**

1. Why does the author describe them as “an honest family”? What is your understanding of the word ‘honest’?
2. How do you think Pansy recognises John Smothers as her grandfather?
3. What point is O. Henry making when he says “There are 6 people in the population of the city”?
4. Look at the several statements in brackets –“(for it was none other than he whom she had married)”, “(for that was Pansy's name)”--what are these statements doing in the story? Why has the writer included them?

**II.B. Answer the following in about 150 words each. (2X10=20)**

1. How did John Smothers’s wife feel after his disappearance? Write from her perspective.
2. What do you think happened in the story after John Smothers disappeared? How would you explain it?

**II.C. Answer any ONE of the following in about 250 words. (1X20=20)**

1. Narrate a strange story you know or have heard. How does it fit the category of strangeness?
2. Imagine that Pansy goes back to school the next morning. What would she tell her friends about John Smothers’s return? Why?

**THEME 3**

**III. Read this short story, titled ‘The Aged Mother’, by Matsuo Basho.**

Long, long ago there lived at the foot of the mountain a poor farmer and his aged, widowed mother. They owned a bit of land which supplied them with food, and they were humble, peaceful, and happy.

Shinano was governed by a despotic leader who though a warrior, had a great and cowardly shrinking from anything suggestive of failing health and strength. This caused him to send out a cruel proclamation. The entire province was given strict orders to immediately put to death all aged people. Those were barbarous days, and the custom of abandoning old people to die was not uncommon. The poor farmer loved his aged mother with tender reverence, and the order filled his heart with sorrow. But no one ever thought twice about obeying the mandate of the governor, so with many deep and hopeless sighs, the youth prepared for what at that time was considered the kindest mode of death.

Just at sundown, when his day’s work was ended, he took a quantity of unwhitened rice which was the principal food for the poor, and he cooked, dried it, and tied it in a square cloth, which he swung in a bundle around his neck along with a gourd filled with cool, sweet water. Then he lifted his helpless old mother to his back and started on his painful journey up the mountain. The road was long and steep; the narrow road was crossed and re-crossed by many paths made by the hunters and woodcutters. In some places, they were lost and confused, but he gave no heed. One path or another, it mattered not. On he went, climbing blindly upward -- ever upward towards the high bare summit of what is known as Obatsuyama, the mountain of the “abandoning of the aged.”

The eyes of the old mother were not so dim but that they noted the reckless hastening from one path to another, and her loving heart grew anxious. Her son did not know the mountain’s many paths and his return might be one of danger, so she stretched forth her hand and snapping the twigs from brushes as they passed, she quietly dropped a handful every few steps of the way so that as they climbed, the narrow path behind them was dotted at frequent intervals with tiny piles of twigs. At last, the summit was reached. Weary and heart sick, the youth gently released his burden and silently prepared a place of comfort as his last duty to the loved one. Gathering fallen pine needles, he made a soft cushion and tenderly lifted his old mother onto it. He wrapped her padded coat more closely around the stooping shoulders and with tearful eyes and an aching heart he said farewell.

The trembling mother’s voice was full of unselfish love as she gave her last injunction. “Let not thine eyes be blinded, my son.” She spoke. “The mountain road is full of dangers. Look carefully and follow the path which holds the piles of twigs. They will guide you to the familiar path farther down.” The son’s surprised eyes looked back over the path, then at the poor old, shrivelled hands all scratched and soiled by their work of love. His heart broke within and bowing to the ground, he cried aloud: “oh, Honourable mother, your kindness breaks my heart! I will not leave you. Together we will follow the path of twigs, and together we will die!”

Once more he shouldered his burden (how light it seemed now) and hastened down the path, through the shadows and the moonlight, to the little hut in the valley. Beneath the kitchen floor was a walled closet for food, which was covered and hidden from view. There the son hid his mother, supplying her with everything she needed, continually watching and fearing she would be discovered. Time passed, and he was beginning to feel safe when again the governor sent forth heralds bearing an unreasonable order, seemingly as a boast of his power. His demand was that his subjects should present him with a rope of ashes.

The entire province trembled with dread. The order must be obeyed yet who in all Shinano could make a rope of ashes? One night, in great distress, the son whispered the news to his hidden mother. “Wait!” she said. “I will think. I will think” On the second day she told him what to do. “Make rope of twisted straw,” she said. “Then stretch it upon a row of flat stones and burn it on a windless night.” He called the people together and did as she said and when the blaze died down, there upon the stones, with every twist and fibre showing perfectly, lay a rope of ashes.

The governor was pleased at the wit of the youth and praised greatly, but he demanded to know where he had obtained his wisdom. “Alas! Alas!” cried the farmer, “the truth must be told!” and with deep bows he related his story. The governor listened and then meditated in silence. Finally, he lifted his head. “Shinano needs more than strength of youth,” he said gravely. “Ah, that I should have forgotten the well-known saying, “with the crown of snow, there cometh wisdom!” That very hour the cruel law was abolished, and custom drifted into as far a past that only legends remain.

**III.A. Answer the questions that follow in about 5 sentences each: (4x5=20)**

1. Apart from the governor’s order, what evidence do we have from the story to suggest that ‘the custom of abandoning old people to die was not uncommon’?
2. Do you think the mother understands the son’s intentions when he carries her up the mountain? Justify your answer.
3. “Once more he shouldered his burden (how light it seemed now) and hastened down the path…” Why would the burden seem light now? Explain.
4. Gourds are fruits that are often dried and used as containers*.* What does this detail tell us about the culture that the story comes from?

**III.B. Answer the following questions in about 150 words each: (2X10=20)**

1. The story does not tell us much about what happens when the farmer smuggles his aged mother back. What kinds of hardships would the son and the mother have to deal with because she was hidden away in the kitchen closet?
2. Folk tales and traditional stories often speak the truth to us and to those in power by reminding us that leaders do not always take the best decisions unless they listen to ordinary people. Have you come across a similar story either in your own language or through your reading? Describe how this story you have come across made its point clear.

**III.C. Answer ANY ONE of the following in about 250 words: (1X20=20)**

1. Who is the oldest person you know? What have your conversations with that person been about? What was the experience like for you?
2. Imagine that the Emperor of Shinano learns about the Governor and his decisions and demands an explanation. Put yourself in the Governor’s position and explain the first decision and why you changed your mind..

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