



ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE-27  
I SEMESTER BSc/BA/BSW/BCom/BBA/BVC/BCA  
END SEMESTER EXAMINATION: JANUARY 2021  
GE 118 – GENERAL ENGLISH

Register Number:

Date: 07-01-2021

PM

TIME: 2½ hours

MAX. MARKS: 70

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

1. This booklet contains **THREE** themes across 8 pages.
2. Please choose any **ONE** theme.
3. Please indicate your stream (CS1, 2, 3) and chosen theme clearly on the front page of your answer booklet.
4. Answer all sections under the theme you have chosen.
5. Do not choose sections at random from different themes.
6. You will lose marks for exceeding the word limit.
7. You are allowed to use a dictionary during the examination.

**THEME ONE**

**I. Read this essay by Kamakshi Ayyar titled 'Keep Calm and Eat a Mango':**

I hear someone ask me to pass the papad for what they say is the umpteenth time, their voice laced with irritation that I've zoned out at the table. As I sheepishly do so, I take stock of the state I'm in. My hands are a sticky mess, I can feel something stuck between my teeth, and there are blobs of saffron-coloured pulp on my T-shirt. It's not one of my finest moments, but it is among the happiest. That's because for a few minutes, I tuned out *everything* and focused on one task: devouring the mango in my hands. It's my daily moment of zen. In the last few months, I've searched for instances that allow my mind to stop pinballing and just pause, and I've found many of them during lunchtime, thanks to my grandmother and mangoes.

My family and I are spending the lockdown in our home in Karjat, just outside Mumbai; my dad wanted to get my aged grandparents out of the city before the coronavirus situation escalated. We're fortunate to be here, surrounded by greenery and spaces to stretch our legs. It's a little difficult to get groceries, but we're lucky to enjoy locally grown vegetables and fruits, including, blessedly, mangoes.

The fruit has been an unexpected source of succour during these disconcerting times. I've been voraciously consuming news about the pandemic and have developed an unhealthy tunnel vision thanks to my social media 'doomscrolling.' The resultant anxiety, helplessness, anger and sadness has made it difficult to think of anything not connected to COVID-19, or anything even remotely cheerful. But summer's arrival, and that of mangoes and my granny's annual ritual of transforming the fruit into various avatars through the season, has reminded me of the small joys of a world beyond the disease.

Ammi's mango preparations are often unveiled at lunch, making the meal the highlight of my day. It began with the pickles towards the end of March — chopped, whole, sweet, tart, and spicy forms of raw mangoes, like the salty green *vadu maanga* and the fiery red *avakkai*. So prolific was the pickle-making that my dad had to ask Ammi to slow down because the lockdown prevented him from getting the oil and salt required. Soon we were digging into tangy curries and salads flecked with *kairi*. Ammi also used this version to make *maanga thuvaiyal*, a refreshing chutney of grated mango, coconut and chillies. Plans to use the *kairi* for *aam panna* were shelved as sugar rations were running low. And now, as the heady fragrance of ripe mangoes fills the air, our lunches revolve around golden Alphonso

eaten whole or in *maambazham morkozhambu*, a south Indian mango *kadhi*. Most years, I take Ammi's mango routine for granted. I relish the flavours and am grateful for the trouble she takes to prepare the items, but that's about it. This year, I value her efforts more because they are a source of comfort and constancy. I despise uncertainties and struggle to accept the looming unknowns the virus foreshadows. In my grandmother and the fruit, I have mascots of dependability, reassuring reminders that certain things can always be counted on. I know that Ammi's mango pickles will always be ready by early April. I know that, no matter how stressed I am, I will unclench my jaw and exhale the first time I taste them. I know that there will be a box of mango seeds in the fridge that Ammi will use for the *kadhi*. I know she will save the sweetest mangoes for me.

Some afternoons, like today, I wonder if it's unwise to take solace in these trivial placebos. Maybe I should focus on preparing for the nebulous future or just let my anxieties run wild. Then I remember that there's always time to brood. Right now, it's time for lunch.

**I A. Answer the following in about 5 sentences each:**

**(4x 5=20)**

1. Why does the writer refer to eating mangoes as her "moment of zen"? Support your answer with instances from the passage.
2. In the concluding paragraph, the writer wonders if she should focus on preparing for the future or simply continue enjoying the present. What do you think she should do? Why?
3. What do you understand by the term 'doomscrolling' as the writer uses it? Have you ever indulged in such activity? Why/Why not?
4. The passage lists a number of mango dishes. Among these, which one would you be most interested to try? Why?

**I B. Answer ANY ONE of the following in about 200 words:**

**(1x15=15)**

4. The writer talks about seeking solace in familiar foods during stressful times. Do you similarly turn to a 'comfort food' during moments of anxiety? Describe how and why this food/dish helps you feel better.
5. Are there any "mascots of dependability" or routines you previously took for granted that you paid special attention to during this year? Describe these in detail.

**II. Read this excerpt from an essay titled 'Love, Pain, Memories: The Story of Food During the Lockdown' by Piyasree Dasgupta:**

As the lockdown stretched into weeks and then months, cooking the food I remembered from my childhood became some sort of a makeshift home I felt like hiding inside. Suddenly, the chaos of my childhood in a constantly conflicted, crowded Calcutta home became the order I pined for in my new, unfamiliar life. Thus came out the lukewarm *doodh bhaath*, and with it, a feeling of closeness to the people who always brought order into my life — my mother, and my late grandmother.

I only began cooking a few years ago, and my dishes mirrored the life I had built for myself. They did not reflect the comfort of home, but the excitement and distractions that came with moving away slightly later in life. My cooking was — like the quirky knick-knacks, moody lamps and flimsy curtains I stuffed my rented houses with — a marked departure from my mother's and grandmother's stern insistence on everything to be practical and thoughtfully budgeted. It was messy, fancy and exciting.

During the lockdown, however, I found myself constantly circling back to the food that I grew up on. My friend Debolina and I chatted about *bhaathe* — vegetables, often chucked into the pot with rice, then mashed up, sprinkled with chillies and a generous splash of mustard oil to go with rice. Vegetables I hated — pumpkin, *kochu* (colocasia), *ole* (yam) — often went down really well that way. My grandmother often tied a cotton *potli* full of moong dal and dropped it into a pot of boiling rice, and then mashed up the dal the same way as the vegetables.

Now when I look back, the frequency with which we ate *bhaathe* tells me a lot about my grandmother's life — the lone elderly woman, looking after two children and cooking for six people, while my mother went to work. *Bhaathe* was nutritious, easy to cook and affordable, values that were often missing from my cooking.

**II A. Answer the following in about 150 words each: (2x10=20)**

1. Contrast the writer's approach to cooking with that of her grandmother's. What do you think their differences reveal about their personalities?
2. "During the lockdown, however, I found myself constantly circling back to the food that I grew up on." Why do you think the writer makes this choice to revisit her childhood meals?

**II B. Answer the following in about 200 words each: (1x15=15)**

3. "...cooking the food I remembered from my childhood became some sort of a makeshift home I felt like hiding inside." Throughout this piece, the writer draws links between memories of her childhood, her home and food. What foods do you associate most strongly with your childhood and home? Describe these connections in detail.

## THEME TWO

**I. Read this essay titled 'The Joy of Commuting' by William Moore:**

I was on a train from Sussex to London, my first since lockdown, when I realised I like my commute. The thought worried me a little. What kind of weirdo have I become? A commute is a psychological hurdle, something to be endured, not enjoyed. What's next? The giddy thrill of waiting in a queue? A root-canal fan club? There are some aspects to commuting I don't enjoy — the expense of a season ticket, of course, and frustrating delays — but overall, yes, I do like it. And during lockdown I actually missed it.

What makes my enjoyment even weirder is that I have no interest in trains. There are some big train enthusiasts in my family — my great uncle can point out inaccuracies in Ravilious's depiction of a third-class Great Western Railway carriage — but I'm neutral at best. It's the journey I like. Or, to be more accurate, I like the uninterrupted two and half hours in my day that the journey guarantees.

I see my commute as a sort of airlock between home and the office. I'm lucky to love my family and my job — it would be hard, I think, to go from one to the other if I dreaded either — but

the commute gives me two and half hours a day to spend how I please with no other task at hand. At the height of lockdown, friends and colleagues raved about the many books they had the time to read now they were working from home. The opposite was true for me. Without my usual time with Southeastern, I was reading much less.

Some people do extraordinary, creative things on their commute. The author Fiona Mozley tapped out her debut novel on her phone. It was shortlisted for the Booker in 2017. Anthony Trollope, who started writing at 5.30 every morning, made a portable, knee-mounted desk so he could continue to work in his carriage. I don't know if anything quite so impressive happens on my Hastings line, but I sometimes see two men playing an early morning game of chess, which is very cheering.

I returned to commuting at the start of August and I can honestly say I've never known the experience to be this good. At the risk of sounding like a tourist who grumbles that Venice is too full of tourists, one of the drawbacks about commuting is other commuters. But now most national rail services are running as normal even though most people are still working from home. So we're in the marvellous situation of having the usual number of trains but for around 20 per cent of the number of commuters. Before the pandemic, my train was usually standing room only by the time it rolled into Charing Cross. I live far enough down the line to always get a seat, but on a bad day it's nose to armpit for some. Now, even in the middle of rush hour, the carriage is nearly deserted. I'm enjoying this while it lasts, because there's no way it can go on. If commuters don't return in large numbers, the rail companies will have to cut their services. Either way, sooner or later, the carriages will start filling up again.

But for now it's blissful. No legs clashing under the table, no body odours, no tinny music droning from neighbouring earbuds. It feels a bit wicked to relish what is essentially a sign of London's economic slump, but one of the eeriest things about this pandemic is how lovely much of it is.

The only major downside to commuting at the moment is the face masks, which have been mandatory on public transport for a while now. It takes some concentration to stop myself from squinting at the distracting bit of fabric on the end of my nose when I'm trying to read. But worse still, masks give train conductors another excuse, as if they needed one, to interrupt the journey's peace with reminders of the rules over the tannoy. If I'm unlucky, I'm stuck with one particularly annoying conductor who delivers his announcements with the forced cheeriness of a game show host handing out prizes. He likes face masks.

In a 1902 essay, H.G. Wells, who was interested in the future of rail travel, predicted that by the year 2000 people would work in London while living anywhere in England south of Nottingham and east of Exeter. Not a bad prophecy; but if anything he underestimated a bit. Today there are people who commute to London from Retford, an hour north of Nottingham. Wells also wrote that 'the daily journey ... has had, and probably always will have, a maximum limit of two hours, one hour each way from sleeping place to council chamber, counter, workroom, or office stool'. Again, he underestimated. Before Covid, nearly four million people in the country travelled for more than two hours to and from work. One or two even enjoyed it. Weirdos.

**I A. Answer the following questions in about 150 words each: (4x10=40)**

1. "A commute is a psychological hurdle, something to be endured, not enjoyed." How did you commute to school/college? What aspects of commuting did you enjoy and what did you unhappily endure?
2. What is the tone that the writer employs with phrases such as "the giddy thrill of waiting in a queue" and "a root-canal fan club"? Why do you think he uses these terms?
3. "One of the drawbacks about commuting is other commuters." Why do you think the author makes this statement? Do you agree with him?
4. The writer mentions author H.G. Wells' 1902 predictions about the future of travel. As someone living in 2020, offer your own predictions about the way humans would travel in the future.

**I B. Answer the following in 250 words: (1x20=20)**

5. Think back to all the times you have travelled by public transport. What aspects of travelling in public have changed for you post the lockdown/pandemic? Describe this in detail.

**II. Read the following selection of tweets published on the radio station website WYNC.org in an entry titled 'Poetry Challenge: An Ode to Your Commute':**

In honor of National Poetry Month, WNYC is inviting listeners to take part in a weekly poetry challenge. Week One's assignment: write an original poem about your commute.

Read some listener submissions below. Use the hashtag #NYCityVerse to submit your entry.

**1. Anna Glebb Sporks**

**@anniesparkie:**

The Staten Island Ferry,  
galumphing orange  
oaf that it is,  
is the hand that  
uncovers the birdcage of my day,  
unceremoniously ripping the  
blanket of twilight  
off my cozy morning haze,  
grinning as it crumples  
the deeply purple sky  
and pockets the last  
couple of stars.

#NYCityVerse

4:18 AM · Apr 7, 2018 · TweetCaster for Android

**2. Chris Lopata**

**@ChrisLopata:**

"Listen," whispered Caleb.

"It's totally quiet."

And for a few brief moments at 7:39 am

No subway cars idled or rumbled by

No PSAs blared over the speakers

As the entire station held its breath

In awe and wonderment.

#NYcityverse

9:00 PM · Apr 6, 2018 · Twitter for iPhone

**3. Sarah Jacobstein**

**@SarahJacobstein:**

Our bus is yellow

I imagine it's filled with jello

Some kids sing

It makes my ears ring

Finally our bus ride ends

We run inside to see our friends

The school bus is no longer our concern

until the afternoon's return ....

- Abbey, age 9

#NYcityverse

7:46 PM · Apr 6, 2018 · Twitter Web Client

**II. Answer the following question in about 150 words: (1x10=10)**

1. The above poems were all based on commuting experiences through different public transport systems in New York City. Imagine you were posed the same challenge as WNYC did to its listeners. Come up with a poem of at least 8 lines about your commute in your own town.

**THEME THREE**

**I. Read the following essay by Geetika Jain titled 'To all the dogs I have loved before':**

When I was a young girl, we lived in Delhi, and on Sunday mornings we would drive to our farm in the Chhatarpur area to spend the day. My father got an Alsatian puppy named Jackie and we left her to be looked after by the farm hands. By the time we returned the next week, she had been renamed Moti (pearl), a name they could relate to. A gorgeous grey wolf-like creature, she died in her middle age of a snakebite.

It was her daughter, Michelle, who came to mean the world to me. We would carry bread and milk to feed her as soon as we got to the farm. She would come bounding up the driveway, leap at us affectionately, yelping her pleasure at seeing us. Her laser-sharp intelligence was evident from the outset, and her strong tail would thump my thigh as we became inseparable buddies. I would take her with me as I wandered the far corners of the farm and beyond, observing weaver birds make their hair-dryer shaped nests and watching jewellery-clad banjara women pat clay into brick moulds. Michelle and I would run on the lawns, and sit side by side as I read my books, with one hand stroking her. Scratch a dog, and you will find a permanent job, they say. Once, when my dad's friend was showing me how to tackle a ball with a hockey stick, she thought we might be fighting, and it was her duty to save me. She leapt up and tore his pants off at the hip.

There came a time when Michelle delivered 14 pups. She ran around the farm with gusto, enjoying the return of her lightness. There weren't enough teats for all of them to suckle, so I took a pan of milk and put it down by them. They ran to it, and began drinking from the edges. Others followed, and when there was no space left, they clambered over their siblings till the last three drank vertically, with their legs in the air.

On Sunday evenings, when we would drive home, she would run after our car, following us for a long while on the tarred road.

A few years later, as we headed to the farm, my mother told me Michelle was very unwell. It was preparation for the big shock. Michelle had died. I found out later she had been run over by a truck when she chased our car the last time.

I had lost her, but the precious reservoir of memories has stayed with me.

Years later, in London, our daughter Aranya laid siege outside our bedroom, tent and all, and letters from school friends addressed to us, for she wanted a dog. We resisted. Our lives were insanely busy, and taking up more responsibility didn't seem like the smart thing to do. There would be loss of spontaneity when planning travel, a messy home, hair on the kitchen floor, all those walks in the cold and dark. Trips to the vet. What if one of us was allergic to the dog? The sound of barking would be deeply unpleasant. Friends brought up cautionary stories of spiralling pet insurance and hip-replacement bills.

But children can charm you into doing the opposite of what feels right, and Calypso, a Golden Retriever, pretty as a painting, came into our lives.

The best thing I did with Calypso was not to spoil her and let any bad habits take root. She soon learnt to sleep on her own in her dog pen. Slowly we trained her to pee and poop outside the house. By rustling the bio-degradable bag when she pooped, she understood we wanted her to do her business when the bag was rustled. Calypso was never fed off the dining table, so she never made Bambi eyes at us when we ate. She learnt to be calm when the bell rang and strangers walked in. Amazingly, she learnt to stay within the front garden even when the gate was open, and to walk alongside us without a leash.

Aranya would swell with pride as her dog awaited her outside the school gates at pickup, and her friends gushed at Calypso. My husband developed a doting "Calypso voice" when he spoke to her. Our son Arjun, who had been terrorized by a Dobermann in his childhood, developed a deeply trusting relationship with her. It healed something deep inside him. Two years later, when he left for college in the US, Calypso seemed to fill in for him. Our numbers had been bolstered by her. By now I felt a deep connection to her. We played chase-the-toy in the garden and she had to sniff out the treats I hid around the house. We sat in companionable silence. She followed me from room to room, parking herself beside me, then sighing in satisfaction. My friends and I walked in the mornings with our dogs, and the world seemed like a perfect place.

The author Orhan Pamuk wrote, "Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen." Every morning, as I took the steps down to the kitchen and family room, Calypso, taking her soft toy in her mouth, would make mewing sounds of welcoming affection. She would wag her tail and her entire bottom with it.

She would present the parts of her body that needed scratching. Sniffing around her empty bowl meant she was still hungry. Following me to the door meant "take me with you".

She was sneaky too, jumping off the family-room sofa where she had slept all night as she heard me come down.

My sense of wonder was stoked by her. Calypso, how come you whiff other dogs' bottoms all the time, but never smell the lavender? What instinct makes you chase wild foxes but shrivel from small yappy dogs? What do you dream of that makes you wince with fear?

Calypso, my elegant jewel, recently passed on, at 13. But every now and then, as I settle into a space, I hear a little sigh.

**I A. Answer the following questions in 150 words each: (4x10=40)**

1. Despite having wonderful experiences with dogs herself, why do you think the writer hesitates to let her daughter have a pet of her own?
2. The author Orhan Pamuk wrote, "Dogs do speak, but only to those who know how to listen." Do you agree that animals do communicate with humans? Answer with examples from your own experiences.
3. At the end of the passage, the writer wonders what goes on behind her dog Calypso's many actions and instincts. Provide an answer to each of her questions about Calypso.
4. Imagine you were the writer's daughter and wanted a pet. Write a letter to your parents/guardians and convince them to allow you to adopt one.

**I B. Answer the following in 200 words: (1x15=15)**

5. Would you call yourself an animal-person? What is your favourite animal? Why? Describe how your relationship with animals has evolved over the years.

**II. Read the following poem titled 'Pet Shopping' by Kenn Nesbitt:**

While shopping at the pet store  
I got my fondest wish.  
I bought myself a fish bowl  
and then a pair of fish.

And since I was already  
out shopping at the store  
I thought I ought to purchase  
another smidgen more.

And so I got a rabbit,  
a hamster and a frog,  
a gerbil and a turtle,  
a parrot and a dog.

I purchased an iguana,  
a tortoise and a rat,  
an eight-foot anaconda,  
a monkey and a cat.

A guinea pig, a gecko,  
a ferret and a mouse,  
and had them all delivered,  
directly to my house.

My sister went berzerko!  
She's now installing locks,  
because I said her bedroom  
would be their litter box!

**II. Answer the following questions in about 5 sentences each: (3x5=15)**

1. What would you do if you were the poet's sister?
2. Provide an alternative title for this poem. Explain your choice.
3. This poem lists a series of potential pets. Apart from a dog or a cat, if you could pick one of these animals as a pet, which one would you choose? Why?

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