

BITS PILANI – K.K. BIRLA GOA CAMPUS
MID-SEMESTER EXAMINATION | SECOND SEMESTER 2022-2023
GS F241: CREATIVE WRITING

Date: 18 March 2023 (11.00 AM – 12.30 PM)

Total Marks: 30

*This exam paper has **two** questions. Answer all the questions. Each question is worth 15 marks. The answer to Q1 should ideally not exceed **1000 words**. Use the answer booklet to write your answer to Q1 and to do rough work for Q2. **Write your final answer to Q2 in the plot diagram sheet separately provided to you.***

Q1. Analyse the following poem by focusing on its structure, language, and theme.

Not Waving But Drowning

— Stevie Smith (1902-1971), English poet

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning:
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.

Poor chap, he always loved larking
And now he's dead
It must have been too cold for him his heart gave way,
They said.

[larking: *playing tricks*]

Oh no no no, it was too cold always
(Still the dead one lay moaning)
I was much too far out all my life
And not waving but drowning.

Q2. Read the following short story, and fill the details about its plot and theme in the blank plot diagram sheet provided to you.

Stench of Kerosene

— Amrita Pritam (1919-2005), Punjabi poet & fiction writer

Outside, a mare neighed. Guleri recognised the neighing and ran out of the house. The mare was from her parents' village. She put her head against its neck as if it were the door of her father's house.

Guleri's parents lived in Chamba. A few miles from her husband's village, which was on high ground, the road curved and descended steeply downhill. From this point one could see Chamba lying a long way away at one's feet. Whenever Guleri was homesick, she would take her husband Manak and go up to this point. She would see the homes of Chamba twinkling in the sunlight and would come back with her heart glowing with pride.

Once every year, after the harvest had been gathered in, Guleri was allowed to spend a few days with her parents. They sent a man to Lakarmandi to bring her back to Chamba. Two of her friends, who were also married to boys outside Chamba, came home at the same time of the year. The girls looked forward to this annual meeting when they spent many hours every day talking about their experiences, their joys and sorrows. They went about the streets together. Then there was the harvest festival. The girls would have new dresses made for the occasion. They would have their dupattas dyed, starched and sprinkled with mica. They would buy glass bangles and silver earrings.

Guleri always counted the days to the harvest. When autumn breezes cleared the skies of the monsoon clouds she thought of little besides her home in Chamba. She went about her daily chores—fed the cattle, cooked food for her husband's parents and then sat back to work out how long it would be before someone would come for her from her parent's village.

And now, once again, it was time for her annual visit. She caressed the mare joyfully, greeted her father's servant, Natu, and made ready to leave the next day.

Guleri did not have to put her excitement into words: the expression on her face was enough. Her husband, Manak, pulled at his chillum and closed his eyes. It seemed either as if he did not like the tobacco, or that he could not bear to face his wife.

"You will come to the fair at Chamba, won't you? Come even if it is only for the day," she pleaded.

Manak put aside his chillum but did not reply.

"Why don't you answer me?" asked Guleri in a temper. "Shall I tell you something?"

"I know what you are going to say: 'I only go to my parents once a year!' Well, you have never been stopped before."

"Then why do you want to stop me this time?" she demanded.

"Just this time," pleaded Manak.

"Your mother has not said anything. Why do you stand in my way?" Guleri was childishly stubborn.

"My mother..." Manak did not finish his sentence.

On the long awaited morning, Guleri was ready long before dawn. She had no children and therefore no problem of either having to leave them with her husband's parents or taking them with her. Natu saddled the mare as she took leave of Manak's parents. They patted her head and blessed her.

"I will come with you a part of the way", said Manak.

Guleri was happy as they set out. Under her dupatta she hid Manak's flute.

After the village of Khajjar, the road descended steeply to Chamba. There Guleri took out the flute from beneath her dupatta and gave it to Manak. She took Manak's hand in hers and said, "Come now, play your flute!" But Manak, lost in his thoughts, paid no heed. "Why don't you play your flute?" asked Guleri coaxingly. Manak looked at her sadly. Then, putting the flute to his lips, he blew a strange anguished wail of sound.

"Guleri, do not go away," he begged her. "I ask you again, do not go this time." He handed her back the flute, unable to continue.

"But why?" she asked. "You come over on the day of the fair and we will return together. I promise you, I will not stay behind."

Manak did not ask again.

They stopped by the roadside. Natu took the mare a few paces ahead to leave the couple alone. It crossed Manak's mind that it was this time of year, seven years ago, that he and his friends had come on this very road to go to the harvest festival in Chamba. And it was at this fair that Manak had first seen Guleri and they had bartered their hearts to each other. Later, managing to meet alone, Manak remembered taking her hand and telling her, "You are like unripe corn—full of milk."

"Cattle go for unripe corn," Guleri had replied, freeing her hand with a jerk. "Human beings like it better roasted. If you want me, go and ask for my hand from my father."

Amongst Manak's kinsmen it was customary to settle the bride price before the wedding. Manak was nervous because he did not know the price Guleri's father would demand from him. But Guleri's father was prosperous and had lived in cities. He had sworn that he would not take money for his daughter, but would give her to a worthy young man of a good family. Manak, he had decided, answered these requirements and very soon after, Guleri and Manak were married. Deep in his memories, Manak was roused by Guleri's hand on his shoulder.

"What are you dreaming of?" she teased him.

Manak did not answer. The mare neighed impatiently and Guleri, thinking of the journey ahead of her, rose to leave. "Do you know the bluebell wood a couple of miles from here?" she asked. "It is said that anyone who goes through it becomes deaf."

"Yes."

"It seems to me that you have passed through the bluebell wood; you do not hear anything that I say."

"You are right, Guleri. I cannot hear anything that you are saying to me," replied Manak with a deep sigh.

Both of them looked at each other. Neither understood the other's thoughts.

"I will go now. You had better return home. You have come a long way," said Guleri gently.

"You have walked all this distance. Better get on the mare," replied Manak.

“Here, take your flute.”

“You take it with you.”

“Will you come and play it on the day of the fair?” asked Guleri with a smile. The sun shone in her eyes. Manak turned his face away. Guleri, perplexed, shrugged her shoulders and took the road to Chamba. Manak returned to his home.

Entering the house, he slumped listless on his charpai. “You have been away a long time,” exclaimed his mother. “Did you go all the way to Chamba?”

“Not all the way; only to the top of the hill,” Manak’s voice was heavy.

“Why do you croak like an old woman?” asked his mother severely. “Be a man.”

Manak wanted to retort, “You are a woman; why don’t you cry like one for a change!” But he remained silent. Manak and Guleri had been married seven years, but she had never borne a child and Manak’s mother had made a secret resolve: “I will not let it go beyond the eighth year.”

This year, true to her decision, she had paid five hundred rupees to get him a second wife and now, she had waited, as Manak knew, for the time when Guleri went to her parents’ to bring in the new bride.

Obedient to his mother and to custom, Manak’s body responded to the new woman. But his heart was dead within him.

Early one morning he was smoking his chillum when an old friend happened to pass by. “Ho Bhavani, where are you going so early in the morning?”

Bhavani stopped. He had a small bundle on his shoulder. “Nowhere in particular,” he replied evasively.

“You must be on your way to some place or the other,” exclaimed Manak. “What about a smoke?”

Bhavani sat down on his haunches and took the chillum from Manak’s hands. “I am going to Chamba for the fair,” he replied at last.

Bhavani’s words pierced through Manak’s heart like a needle.

“Is the fair today?”

“It is the same day every year,” replied Bhavani drily.

“Don’t you remember, we were in the same party seven years ago?” Bhavani did not say any more but Manak was conscious of the other man’s rebuke and he felt uneasy. Bhavani put down the chillum and picked up his bundle. His flute was sticking out of the bundle. Bidding Manak farewell, he walked away. Manak’s eyes remained on the flute till Bhavani disappeared from view.

Next afternoon when Manak was in his fields he saw Bhavani coming back but deliberately he looked the other way. He did not want to talk to Bhavani or hear anything about the fair. But Bhavani came round the other side and sat down in front of Manak. His face was sad, lightless as a cinder.

“Guleri is dead,” said Bhavani in a flat voice.

“What?”

“When she heard of your second marriage, she soaked her clothes in kerosene and set fire to them.”

Manak, mute with pain, could only stare and feel his own life burning out.

The days went by. Manak resumed his work in the fields and ate his meals when they were given to him. But he was like a man dead, his face quite blank, his eyes empty.

“I am not his spouse,” complained his second wife. “I am just someone he happened to marry.”

But quite soon she was pregnant and Manak’s mother was well pleased with her new daughter-in-law. She told Manak about his wife’s condition, but he looked as if he did not understand, and his eyes were still empty.

His mother encouraged her daughter-in-law to bear with her husband’s moods for a few days. As soon as the child was born and placed in his father’s lap, she said, Manak would change.

A son was duly born to Manak’s wife; and his mother, rejoicing, bathed the boy, dressed him in fine clothes and put him in Manak’s lap. Manak stared at the new born baby in his lap. He stared a long time, uncomprehending, his face, as usual, expressionless. Then suddenly the blank eyes filled with horror, and Manak began to scream. “Take him away!” he shrieked hysterically. “Take him away! He stinks of kerosene.”

—Translated from the original Punjabi by **Khushwant Singh**
