

**ST. JOSEPH’S COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS), BANGALORE- 27**

**I SEMESTER BSc/BCA/BBA/BCom/BPS/IFA**

SEMESTER EXAMINATION: OCTOBER 2021

(Examination conducted in February-March 2022)

**L2 GE 121 – General English**

**Time: 3 hours Max. Marks: 60**

**THIS PAPER CONTAINS EIGHT PRINTED SHEETS**

**INSTRUCTIONS**

1. This paper contains THREE THEMES. You are expected to choose one Theme.
2. Please write the THEME you choose on the first page.
3. Please adhere to the word limit.
4. You are allowed to use a dictionary.

**Theme – 1**

1. **Read the following passage titled *Amamma and her Parlakimidi* *dressing table* by Ram Mohan Kavuturu from the Museum of Material Memory, 28 December 2018.**

You wouldn’t guess my amamma (maternal grandmother) is 90 years old if you saw her eat. Even at her advanced age, she manages to live up to her standard of defining a person’s Telugu-ness: the coefficient of redness in the aavakaaya annam one eats.

The aavakaaya will pass no modern test of healthy food. It compromises nowhere and chooses the most potent in all its ingredients: sour mangoes, fierce chillies, pungent mustard, excessive salt and oil. This assault on the intestines, however, is a badge of honour for many like my amamma. She will even chide others attempting to water down the effect of the pickle by adding more rice to the mix, or adding extra dollops of ghee to the rice mix. She definitely can’t stand the sight of the pickle being used just as an accomplice to curd rice or pappu annam (dal chawal). Amamma, in fact, loves these potent assaults on the senses so much that she attributes her laser-sharp memory at her advanced age to these assaults. Like a well-catalogued library run by an efficient librarian, her mind can retrieve minor details of several events of her long life with amazing alacrity and accuracy.

Amamma’s long life has, naturally, seen plenty of ups and downs. On the personal front, she lost her husband before she turned sixty while her elder son died before he turned sixty; materially, she lost her ancestral home in Rajamundry and another property in Secunderabad, her adopted home. The loss of the Rajamundry home was particularly painful because of the grandeur and memories associated with it. Called [manduva logili](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manduva_Logili" \l "cite_note-1),  these massive homes meant for joint families had rooms on the four sides opening up onto a spacious courtyard. With some families moving out and the remaining unable to burden the massive costs of maintenance, it became inevitable to bring the home down. With amamma herself relocating to Secunderabad, she was powerless to do anything about it. But, she shrugs off the painful memory with a smile and says, “at least this is the one thing that has remained with me all my life.”

The “one thing” amamma is referring to is a dressing table. In its heyday, the majestic rosewood-made dressing table must have grabbed the attention of all in the room with everyone wanting to develop a tress or a mane just to look majestic in the pristine mirror that shone large in the middle of the table.

“I just don’t get carpenters with linseed oil these days. This dressing table can shine again only if polished with linseed oil which many carpenters around here do not have” says amamma explaining the current state of the dressing table. Placed near the entrance of the main room of the small house she stays in, the table now is shorn of its former glory and more a stand for the landline phone which amamma is hugely fond of and it’s drawers a dumping ground for used clothes.

The story of the dressing table goes back to the 1920’s to what is now a nondescript town on the Andhra – Odisha border (the town falls in Odisha, to be exact): Parlakimidi or Parlakhemundi. The focal point of the town is the sublime 3-storey palace of the Gajapati kings who ruled Parlakimidi and surrounding areas before India’s independence. Having always referred to him only as the “Gajapati raju” or “Parlakimidi raju,” amamma does not know the name of the king. A quick search on the internet will reveal that the king in question around those times in all possibility is Krushna Chandra Gajapati, a man who would go on to have a significant role in creation of an Odisha-speaking state.

Amamma’s grandfather Sitaramaswamy was employed as a dewan (the title of a minister or a powerful government official in many of India’s pre-independent kingdoms) in the palace of the Gajapati king during the decade of the 1920s. In keeping with the demands of the times, the king and his dewan (amamma’s grandfather) felt the need to master English and decided to employ a governess from England to help them out. This dorasaani (countess) as amamma calls her, would go on to live for seven to eight years in the palace to teach the king and the dewan English. The dewan, in return, would teach the governess Telugu. In all the years of mutual teaching a good rapport had developed between the dewan and the governess to the extent that “rumors were strong in the town of something between the two,” amamma recalls with an impish smile. After seven or eight years in Parlakimidi, time had come for the governess to go back to England and the king felt it appropriate to reward his teacher handsomely. Among the many gifts he bestowed upon her, was a beautifully carved rosewood dressing table with an imposing mirror at the center of it.

A tradition among the affluent of those days, amamma recalls, was to send one’s daughter to her in-law’s place with a dressing table in tow. With the memory of the king’s gift to the English governess fresh in mind, it did not take the dewan long to get a similar one made for his daughter Sakuntala. The dewan’s son-in-law Venkataramaiah, fresh of a barrister degree, planned to stay back in Parlakimidi post the marriage to practise law in the local courts and thus at least at the start, for some years, the dressing table remained in Parlakimidi.

That the table would always be a trusted bridesmaid but never the glittering maid was written into its fate pretty early. Sakunthala died in 1938, 10 years after she had given birth to amamma. Amamma, obviously, has very feeble memory of her mother but does recall sepia-toned images of her mother spending hours in front of the dressing table mirror every morning. By the time of Sakunthala’s death, the family had moved to Rajahmundry, her husband Venkataramaiah’s hometown, and so did the dressing table. With no one to care for and no one with long enough tresses to find use of the mirror, the table inevitably went into use for more mundane tasks. Venkatramaiah was obsessed with sniffing tobacco and the table was the ideal ground for him to line up his little cylindrical steel containers of snuff. Amamma remembers that Venkatramaiah also found good use of one of the finials of the table by hanging up his loosened turban.

Amamma was the exact opposite of her mother and hardly remembers spending any time in front of the mirror. “Tons of coconut oil and a good head bath,” are all the beauty tips she has to offer.  Instead, amamma remembers spending plenty of time beside the table when she  doubled up as a Receiver for her laywer-father during her student days. A Receiver is appointed by the court to safeguard valuables of two parties in dispute till a solution is found. The spacious drawers of the table were thought best to hold the valuables and amamma spent several hours gatekeeping the table when her father was not at home.

In the 1970s, amamma and the table moved to the cantonment town of Secunderabad along with her husband’s central government job. Amamma’s seemingly smooth life was shaken up by her husband’s premature death in the early 80s and a series of financial issues ensued. Amamma moved homes several times and each time lost something or the other including “tons of literature on Napoleon Bonaparte whom your grandfather greatly admired.”

Either by intention or sheer luck, however, the table has remained and made it this far. But, amamma is quick to add a caveat saying “this is heavy, takes up lots of space and is tough to maintain and i am getting old….” Before she could even end the sentence, the landline rings and amamma is off talking.

With amamma’s words audible in the background, my mind races through all the generations, people, events, and memories this seemingly dead piece of wood has seen. Just as it passes my mind that i should somehow find linseed oil good enough that can make the table shine again, amamma calls out: “This year’s stock of mangoes was really good and this summer’s aavakaaya is ready. Go have it with the hot rice in the kitchen.”

1. **Answer the following questions in about 5-8 sentences each: (3X5=15)**
2. The narrator says aavakaaya will not pass the modern test of healthy food. Why?
3. “You wouldn’t guess my amamma (maternal grandmother) is 90 years old if you saw her eat. Even at her advanced age, she manages to live up to her standard of defining a person’s Telugu-ness: the coefficient of redness in the aavakaaya annam one eats.”

The narrator connects ‘Telugu-ness’ to the redness in the aavakaaya annam (a variety of food from Andhra Pradesh). What ‘ness’ apply for you and which food would you choose for it.

1. What are the beauty tips the narrator gets from *Amamma?* Have you received any beauty tips from your grandparents / parents? Share two funny/strange beauty tips that you’ve heard from your parents.
2. **Answer any THREE of the following questions in about 150 words each: (3X10=30)**
3. Are our food habits changing over time? What are the major changes that you notice in your family? Share one dish that you miss being prepared at home because of the changes in food habits over time.
4. What is the difficulty in maintaining the dressing table owned by *Amamma*? Does your family possess any such old household item? How do you take care of it?
5. What were the reasons for the King Gajapathi and the dewan to learn English? How did they learn a new language? What are the ways you would suggest to learn a new language in the 21st century?
6. How did *Amamma* use the dressing table? Have you observed people use the furniture or household items differently from its intended purpose? Do such habits tell us about the cultural backgrounds of the family?
7. **Answer any ONE of the following questions in about 200 words: (1X15=15)**
8. The article shares the history of the king on the one side and narrates the history of a family heirloom. Which history seems more interesting to you? Why? Do you think the personal stories could also be part of larger history?
9. The narrator in the article says that the dressing table was gifted to daughters during their wedding. Do such practice/s prevail even now? Have you heard your mother /aunts talk about such practices in their wedding? Do men in the family share such practices?

**Theme – 2**

1. **Read the following excerpt from the book *Amma* by Perumal Murugan.**

**The Book Addict**

For *Amma*,(Mother) paper was just an item of utility. The provisions she bought in the market were wrapped in paper. Cumin seeds, pepper and mustard seeds were packaged in small pieces of paper and tied with a thread, while grains, pulse varieties and roasted Bengal gram were packed in large paper bags. Though we did not have to buy grains and pulses because we grew them in our fields, our supply of roasted bengal gram and spices came from the market. After emptying the provisions into their boxes, Amma would carefully save the pieces of paper and the paper bags in a basket. If she found loose paper lying around anywhere, she picked those up as well and brought them home. Amma was really fond of paper.

This was because papers were particularly useful to light the stove with. People who use firewood will appreciate this. Dead palm fronds and dry leaves were just as good, but they were not as easy to store as paper, which could be stuffed into a basket. Nothing worked like paper when it rained – one only had to stack up the firewood with sufficient space for air to pass through, place a piece of paper beneath it and light it up. The wood would catch fire immediately.

My brother and I were instructed to keep papers torn from our school notebooks in this basket. *Amma* would rage wild and scold if she caught us throwing any loose papers away. If there was none around to light the stove with, *Amma* tore a few pages from the back of our notebooks, which was a bit of a problem. If the sheet of paper torn off was attached to another in which we had taken notes, that too would come off. We would then pick a fight with *Amma*, at the end of which we usually declared that we were going to bunk school. ‘The teachers will beat me up. I can’t go to school!’ We never missed an opportunity to miss school. Amma would struggle to placate us and send us off.

At the end of every academic year, we sold our school books to the incoming batch of students at half their original price. Students were eager to buy books that had the binding and pages intact. We could also score a few *vadais* from a tea stall if we gave the pages from our used notebooks after removing the hard binding. *Amma* didn’t want us to do this, though. She would tie the notebooks with a thread and stack them away. That would be enough kindling for at least a couple of months. Enough stock to tide over the monsoon, Amma would say. Those were the days when it did rain during the rainy season.

But there also came a time when *Amma* began to despise paper. When I was in class nine, I started buying magazines and literary books. None of the shops in our village sold them, so I ordered them through VVP after seeing advertisements in magazines. The postman would deliver the books and collect the money. *Amma* would silently watch me hand the money over. The loathing and anger on her face could scorch.

As soon as the postman left, she would begin ranting, going on and on, and there was no way I could read the book then. I would go and sit somewhere in a field and not return for a long time. Though Amma would call out loudly enough, I would pretend not to hear and return home only after dark.

‘He forgets everything around him when he has a book in his hand. At this rate, is he going to have the time to study well, become a district collector and give all his money to me? I graze goats and cows, sell milk diluted with water and save every paisa. This dog throws all our money at paper! I don’t know how he is going to survive!’ and so on and on she grumbled.

The more *Amma* scolded me, the deeper grew my fascinations with books. I threatened her every day when leaving home. ‘Don’t you dare misplace my books on the pretext of cleaning or sweeping the house. If you do, I’ll never come back.’

I named my brother’s daughter, born in 1985, *Elamathi*. Nonetheless, to check if there were better names, I ordered a book titled *Names of Babies* from Manimekalai Publishers. Was it necessary to spend money and buy a book just for naming a child, Amma scolded me severely.

I lived and studies in Chennai for a few year, and had also got married around that time. I had by then become the owner of a substantial collection of books – many bought in Chennai, piles of them I had picked up from scrap stores, some stolen from others and so on. In 1996, I got a government job and shifted to our village with my new family. I was a college professor and the first government employee in our village – a matter of pride for *Amma*.

We had very few things to transport from Chennai. The ten cartons of books that we had dispatched soon reached us. Now, there were a few years, thousands books at home, including those that were already here.

We lived in a one-bedroom house. Where was the place for books? I built long concrete shelves on the walls to properly store them all. Amma raised no objections. She once said: ‘Your father was obsessed with alcohol and beedis. Addicted to them, he tortured us until he passed away. Your elder brother is also addicted to drinking and smoking beedis. He also causes much trouble. Every human being has some addiction. Is there a person without one? You too have an addiction – books. Other than the fact that it is an expensive obsession, it doesn’t trouble anyone. Go on, do as you please, buy more and stack them up to your heart’s content!’

1. **Answer the following questions in about 5-8 sentences each: (4X5=20)**
2. Why was the narrator’s mother fond of collecting paper? Is there anything your mother/father is interested in collecting?
3. Is there a specific habit that your parents are unhappy with? Do you agree/disagree with their viewpoint?
4. Why does the narrator pretend to not hear his mother? Have you ever pretended not to hear your mother/father? Narrate one moment you have pretended to not hear them.
5. The Mother calls the narrator ‘a dog’ in anger. What are the words used by your parents to scold you? Which of these do you dislike the most?
6. **Answer any FOUR of the following questions in about 150 words each: (4X10=40)**
7. The narrator’s mother sold the books to half price after the academic year ended. What memories do you have about your school text books? What did you do with your books after the academic year ended during your school days? Have you preserved any books from those days?
8. The narrator purchases *Names of Babies* to find out a better name for his brother’s daughter. Who chose your name? What is the story behind it? If you were to change your name, what name would you choose? Why?
9. Do you have a habit of collecting carry bags / papers or any other product? Where and how do you organise them? What do you do with it later?
10. The narrator says that he picked up books from scrap stores and some stolen from others. Do you think it is fine to steal books? Is there anybody you’ve stolen a book from? Would you like to apologise to any of them?
11. In the last paragraph, the mother talks about different kinds of addiction. Do you think the word ‘addiction’ is justified in this context?

**Theme – 3**

1. **Observe the illustration given below:**

A picture containing text

Description automatically generated

By – Indu Lalitha Harikumar

**Text in the illustration** – If someone has been good to me once, has helped me or has bought me an expensive gift, I must offer them lifelong loyalty.

**IA. Answer the following questions in about 4-8 sentences: (4X5=20)**

1. Why do you think the woman has closed her eyes in the illustration? Is the illustrator trying to convey something through that?
2. The woman’s figure is placed on a hand. What do you infer from this?
3. What is the one-word title you would give to this illustration? Explain the choice of the word.
4. What is the priceless gift you’ve received until now?

**IB. Answer any TWO of the following questions in about 100-150 words: (2X10=20)**

1. Is the artist looking at themselves seriously or otherwise? What is the reason for saying so?
2. Do you feel that someone puts you under pressure when they share an expensive gift? Do you give a return gift in such circumstances? What else do you do to come out of that pressure?
3. Reflect on your recent emotions and illustrate one panel with what you think is worrying you in the recent past. (You are not tested based on the quality of the drawing but based on the content and creativity.
4. **Read the poem by Richard Greene**

**carefully:**

**Play Jolly Music at my Funeral**  
I've taken in recent years to thinking about my funeral  
and have decided to make one paramount request:  
play jolly music at that ritual.  
What good does it do to heap on dirges  
or other mournful melodies?  
I won't be there to be gratified by the grieving  
and if I could tune in  
I'd be happier to see those present have some relief.  
Dixieland would be nice.  
Joplin would be fine.  
Something by Fats Waller would certainly do.  
Those early jazzmen knew what they were up to  
when they set about making funeral marches swing.  
So swing me away, please, with a rousing tune.

**IIA. Answer any TWO of the following questions: (2X10=20)**

1. The poet lists out bands and artists to be played in his funeral (Dixieland, Joplin, Fats Waller). If you were to replace the list with your favourite bands/musicians, what would you replace it with and why?
2. Narrate a funeral that was moving to you.
3. “One night, at nine, I set out towards the graveyard. A friend insisted that he wanted to come, and he wouldn’t listen to me when I asked him to stay behind. I gave in and took him along. When we opened the gate of the graveyard and stepped in, he started –

‘Look, why are there so many people here?’ he asked. But there was no one there. I realized he had mistaken the white stones on the graves for people.”

What do you think is the attitude towards death and graveyard in the above lines? Is it similar/different from the attitude in the poem?