

**M. A. DEGREE EXAMINATION, APRIL 2010**  
**BRANCH VII – ENGLISH**  
**SECOND SEMESTER**

**COURSE : MAJOR – CORE**  
**PAPER : CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY**  
**TIME : 3 HOURS** **MAX. MARKS : 100**

**SECTION – A**

- I. Write short essays on any FOUR of the following in about 250 words each:**  
(4x10=40)
- Show how close reading of texts was important to New Criticism.
  - Explain Semiotics as a critical approach to a study of a text.
  - Examine Deconstruction as a method of finding meaning in a literary text.
  - What are the salient features of Post – Structuralism?
  - ‘New Historicism is a critical methodology which politicized and stressed the intimate interrelationship between literature, culture and history’ – Elucidate
  - Account for the current status of subaltern studies
  - Attempt a brief survey of the status of the major critical theories in the last fifty years

**SECTION – B**

- I. Write an essay on any ONE of the following in about 750 words : (1x20=20)**
- What are Freud’s views in ‘Creative Writers and Day Dreaming’?
  - Show how Roland Barthes’ ‘The Death of the Author’ over turns traditional literary studies.
- II. Write an essay on any ONE of the following in about 750 words: (1x20=20)**
- What are the salient ideas in Umberto Eco’s ‘Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare?’
  - Give an account of Kolodny’s arguments in “A Map for Re-reading.”
  - How does Lyotard define ‘The Post-Modern?’

**SECTION – C** **(2x10=20)**

**Practical Criticism**

**Attempt a critical analysis of any two of the passages given. Specify the theory and its aspects / concepts used in your analysis.**

- Red Ribbons by Imtiaz Dharker
- Because I could not stop for Death by Emily Dickinson
- Ode to the West Wind by Percy Bysche Shelley
- From Voices in the City by Anita Desai.

- a. Red ribbons  
by Imtiaz Dharker

One girl haunts me,  
The one I meet  
Coming out of the makeshift hut  
At the end of every dusty street.

It must be  
the red ribbons that she wears,  
shining against the careful hair,  
nylon formed into a perfect bow,  
plumped out and backlit by the sun.  
the one  
who emerges out of chaos,  
poised. Just so.

How many of her are there?  
How many, hidden under  
The layer of lies?  
The ones who stride down dirt  
tracks,  
The ones who have filled an ocean  
bucket by bucket all their power  
concentrated in the hip-bone.  
The arm at work,  
pulling in the socket.  
How many steps have they taken  
to how many wells?

Draw that line,  
Draw a line on all the footsteps  
from home to water,  
from water back to home.

Now draw those lines again  
Across my face.  
Make a net of them to catch me like a fish.  
Pull me in.

Look hard at my face  
This is how faces look  
After they have broken through  
bricks walls, glass ceilings,  
seductive cloth, cages  
of gold, curtains of fire.

Wired hard to light,  
the kind that whips away  
the darkness in the soul,  
unties the knotted heart  
ties bright ribbons in my hair and makes my body whole.

- b. Emily Dickinson  
BECAUSE I COULD NOT STOP FOR DEATH  
(From the Chariot)

Because I could not stop for death,  
He kindly stopped for me;  
The carriage held but just ourselves  
And immortality.

We slowly drove, he knew no haste,  
And I had put away  
My labor, and my leisure too,  
For his civility.

We passed the school where children strove  
At recess, in the ring.  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun.

Or rather he passed us.  
The dews drew quivering and chill,  
For only gossamer my gown—  
My tippet only tulle.

We paused before a house that seemed  
A swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible,  
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each  
Feels shorter than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were towards eternity.

- c. Percy Bysshe Shelley  
ODE TO THE WEST WIND

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,  
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead  
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow and black, and pale, and hectic red,  
Pestilence-stricken multitudes : o thou,  
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,  
Each like a corpse within its grave, until  
Thine azure sister of the Spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill  
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)  
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild spirit, which art moving everywhere;  
Destroyer and preserver, hear, oh, hear!

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion.  
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,  
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread  
On the blue surface of thine aery suge,  
Like the bright hair hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge  
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,  
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night  
Will be the dome of a vast sepulcher,  
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere  
Black rain, and fire, and hail will burst: oh, hear!

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams  
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,  
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiae's bay  
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers  
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers  
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou  
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below  
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear  
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow gray with fear,  
And tremble and despoil themselves, oh, hear!

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;  
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;  
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free  
 Than thou, O uncontrollable! If even  
 I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,  
 As then, when to outstrip thy skyey speed  
 Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need,  
 Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!  
 I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained, and bowed  
 One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:  
 What if my leaves are falling like its own!  
 The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,  
 Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,  
 My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe  
 Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth!  
 And, by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter as from an unextinguished hearth  
 Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!  
 Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,  
 If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

- d. I see many women, always Bengali women, who follow five paces behind their men. They wear saris of the dullest colours, beige and fawn and off-white like the female birds in the cages, and there is something infinitely gentle, infinitely patient about their long eyes, the curve of their shoulders, their manner of walking, which arouses not aggressiveness in one, as the women of the north do, but a protective feeling. They make me a little ashamed of myself—of my defiance towards Kalyani and Jiban's mother—and I think of generations of Bengali women hidden behind the barred windows of half-dark rooms, spending centuries in washing clothes, kneading dough and murmuring aloud verses from the Bhagvad-Gita and the Ramayana, in the dim light of sooty lamps. Lives spent in waiting for nothing, waiting on men self-centred and indifferent and hungry and demanding and critical waiting for death and dying misunderstood, always behind bars, those terrifying black bars that shut us in the old houses, in the old city.

The tiger paces up and down. Now and then he groans, and his eyes are like the glass eyes of a stuffed trophy on the wall, for he is dead already. The eyes of these silent Bengali women are not dead, but they anticipate death, as they do everything with resignation. There is no dignity in their death as in the death of the proud and glorious beast, but only a little melancholy as in the settling of a puff of dust upon the earth... What does it all mean? Why are lives such as these lived? At their conclusion, what solution, what truth falls into the waiting palm of one's hand, the still pit of one's heart?

Here is the answer—here, here, here. Look. I will scream. I cannot believe—but here it is. Look through these bars, into this cage of doves—look, look at the terrible answer. Doves like balls of raincloud, but in each soft breast a great open wound, bleeding, scarlet seeping over tiny feathers in a blot of fresh blood. Wounded and bleeding, but scurrying about their cages, pecking up grain, while over them fly blithe budgerigars like animated splinters of rainbow. These stay on the ground, restless, in flux, and bleeding. The dove's stigmata—what does it mean? How can it be possible? How can they live, eat, work, sign, bleeding through life?

'They are called Bleeding Heart Doves. See you can read it in the board up there,' says Tuk Tuk, who shares her mother's disdain of me. 'What is the matter?' asks Bun Bun, leaning against me in fear and on my other side Annu presses her hand over my wrist and says 'it is only the colour of their feathers. Aunt, it is only the red feather that look like blood.

'It is the answer' I tell them, but what the answer means, I cannot explain. Fresh blood gushing from their breasts, unstaunched, the doves murmur and croon. I wonder, I think that Nirode could explain.

To pretend to have forgotten, to pretend to believe in these trivialities, these pettinesses of our mean existence—is that right? To sort the husk from the rice, to wash and iron and to talk and sleep, when this is not what one believes in at all? What force of will does it require to shed, as I believe my brother has, has at least to an extent, shed, the unnecessary, the diverting, and live the clean, husked, irreducible, life? If I had religious faith, I could easily enough renounce all this. But I have no faith no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing I can give myself to, and so I must stay. The family here, and their surroundings, tell me such a life cannot be lived—a life dedicated to nothing—that this husk is a protection from death. Ah yes, yes, then it is a choice between death and mean existence, and that, surely, is not a difficult choice.

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