

# Women's Writing PYQ 2021

**Q1. Gender and race intersect with each other to heighten women's oppression. Discuss with reference to any one text in the course.**

**Ans.** One text that illustrates the intersection of gender and race to heighten women's oppression is Toni Morrison's novel "Beloved." Set in the aftermath of slavery in the United States, the novel delves deeply into the experiences of African American women and the complex ways in which their identities as both women and black individuals intersect to create a unique and intensified form of oppression. The character of Sethe, in particular, exemplifies the intersectionality of these identities and the profound impact on her life. **Here's how the novel depicts this intersection:**

## **1. Trauma and Identity:**

In "Beloved," Sethe's experiences as a black woman under the institution of slavery have left her with deep emotional and psychological scars. Her identity is shaped by her traumatic past, and the oppression she faced as both a woman and a black individual is inseparable from her sense of self.

## **2. Motherhood and Exploitation:**

Sethe's identity as a mother is crucial to understanding her experiences. She had to make the agonizing choice to kill her own child rather than let her be subjected to the horrors of slavery. This act speaks to the unique struggles of enslaved black women who faced exploitation of their reproductive capacities and were often powerless to protect their own children.

## **3. Objectification and Ownership:**

Enslaved women like Sethe were subjected to objectification, treated as property rather than human beings. The intersection of gender and race intensified this objectification, as they were exploited both as laborers and as objects of sexual desire by their white oppressors.

## **4. Double Marginalization:**

Sethe's experience reflects the double marginalization that African American women faced. They were marginalized within the broader society due to their race, and they were also marginalized within feminist and civil rights movements that were predominantly led by white women and men.

## **5. Disrupted Family Ties:**

The legacy of slavery disrupted family bonds for African American women, as they were often separated from their loved ones through sale. Sethe's experiences of having her family torn apart further highlight the compounded impact of gender and race on her oppression.

## **6. The Concept of "Beloved":**

The character of Beloved, who embodies both the legacy of slavery and Sethe's own guilt and trauma, exemplifies the intertwining of race and gender. Beloved's presence forces Sethe to confront the intersection of her identities and the ways in which her experiences have been shaped by both factors.

**In conclusion**, Toni Morrison's "Beloved" vividly portrays the intersection of gender and race in shaping the experiences of African American women like Sethe. The novel powerfully illustrates how the oppression faced by black women was unique and intensified due to the compounded impact of their identities. Sethe's story exemplifies the struggles and complexities of women who navigated the intersections of race and gender during a period of profound social and historical upheaval.

**Q2. The views expressed by the characters in "Sultana's Dream" show men in a poor light. Analyse Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain's critique of patriarchy in the story.**

**Ans.** "Sultana's Dream" by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain is a feminist utopian short story that critiques patriarchy through its portrayal of a gender-reversed world where women are in positions of power and men are confined to the domestic sphere. The story offers a scathing critique of the oppressive patriarchal norms of the author's society. The views expressed by the characters in the story serve to highlight the negative aspects of men's dominance and women's subjugation. **Here's how Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain critiques patriarchy in "Sultana's Dream":**

**1. Male Dominance and Subjugation of Women:**

In the story, the male characters are depicted as oppressive and controlling figures who deny women education and confine them to the domestic realm. The "Purdah" system, symbolizing women's seclusion, illustrates how patriarchy limits women's freedom and participation in public life.

**2. Critique of Traditional Gender Roles:**

The male characters' views reflect traditional gender roles that relegate women to subordinate positions. These roles are shown to perpetuate women's lack of agency and control over their lives. The views of the male characters serve to expose the inherent inequality in these traditional roles.

**3. Resistance to Change:**

The men's insistence on maintaining the status quo reflects a resistance to change and an unwillingness to recognize women's capabilities. This highlights the rigidity of patriarchal norms that hinder progress and equality.

**4. Intellectual Ignorance:**

The male characters' dismissal of women's intellectual abilities reflects a systemic bias against women's education and intellectual pursuits. This critique draws attention to how patriarchy systematically suppresses women's potential.

**5. Satirical Elements:**

The exaggerated and nonsensical arguments presented by the male characters satirize the illogical justifications for women's subordination. This satire exposes the absurdity of patriarchal attitudes and reveals the flimsy foundations on which they rest.

**6. Utopian Alternative:**

Through the utopian world of Ladyland, the story presents an alternative reality where women's potential is fully realized. This serves as a powerful critique of the patriarchal society by imagining a world where women's intelligence, capabilities, and leadership are embraced.

**In conclusion**, Rokeya Shakhawat Hossain's "Sultana's Dream" critiques patriarchy by portraying a world where traditional gender roles are reversed. The views expressed by the male characters emphasize the oppressive nature of patriarchy and the detrimental effects it has on women's lives. By highlighting the absurdity and harmful consequences of these views, the story serves as a sharp critique of the deeply ingrained gender inequalities present in society. Through its imaginative and thought-provoking narrative, the story challenges readers to question and dismantle patriarchal norms and envision a more equitable world.

**Q3. Women's confessional poetry expresses an awareness of their "gendered asymmetry of their relationship to power." Elaborate with reference to any two poets.**

**Ans.** Women's confessional poetry often reflects an acute awareness of the gendered dynamics that shape their relationship to power. This genre allows female poets to explore and express their personal experiences, struggles, and vulnerabilities, particularly in relation to societal norms, expectations, and power imbalances. Two poets who exemplify this awareness are Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton. **Let's examine their works to elaborate on how their confessional poetry highlights the "gendered asymmetry" of their relationship to power:**

#### **1. Sylvia Plath:**

Sylvia Plath's confessional poetry, marked by its raw emotional intensity, delves into the complexities of her own life, mental health, and societal pressures. Her poems often reveal her awareness of the gendered power dynamics that impact her identity and relationships.

**"Daddy":** This poem is a powerful exploration of Plath's complicated relationship with her father and husband. The metaphor of the father as a Nazi and the husband as a vampire illustrates her feeling of entrapment and powerlessness within patriarchal structures. Plath's confessional voice confronts the unequal power dynamics in her life and symbolically seeks liberation from them.

**"Lady Lazarus":** Plath's persona in this poem addresses themes of death, rebirth, and the male gaze. The speaker's defiance and resurrection after repeated attempts to extinguish her life showcase her awareness of being objectified and controlled by societal norms. Through her confessional voice, Plath critiques the societal expectations that contribute to her struggles.

#### **2. Anne Sexton:**

Anne Sexton's confessional poetry also navigates the complexities of gendered power dynamics and personal struggles. Her works often delve into issues of mental health, identity, and societal constraints.

**"The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator":** This poem explores the intimate yet often silenced topic of female sexuality. Sexton's frank and unapologetic portrayal highlights the power imbalances that can exist within sexual relationships. By reclaiming and expressing her own desires, Sexton challenges traditional norms and societal judgments.

**"Cinderella":** Sexton's reimagining of the Cinderella fairy tale subverts the idea of a passive and submissive heroine. Through a confessional lens, she critiques the notion that a woman's worth lies in marrying into power or privilege. This poem reflects an awareness of societal pressures that can shape women's aspirations and identities.

**In both Plath and Sexton's poetry**, the confessional mode becomes a vehicle for critiquing the gendered asymmetry of power dynamics. Their introspective and emotionally charged poems shed light on the ways societal norms, family dynamics, and personal struggles intersect to shape their understanding of power and identity as women. By sharing their experiences openly, these poets contribute to a broader awareness of the complexities of women's lives within patriarchal systems.

**Q4. Rassundari Debi's transgressive desires are at the centre of her life narration in "Amar Jiban." Comment.**

**Ans.** Rassundari Debi's autobiographical work "Amar Jiban" (My Life) is a significant text that provides insight into her personal experiences and challenges as a woman in 19th-century Bengal. The narrative indeed centers around Rassundari Debi's transgressive desires, which challenge societal norms and expectations of her time. These desires are at the heart of her journey, shaping her identity, struggles, and the trajectory of her life. **Here's a closer look at how her transgressive desires are central to the narration:**

**1. Desire for Knowledge and Learning:**

Rassundari Debi's primary transgressive desire is her thirst for knowledge and education, which was unconventional for women in her society during that era. Despite the societal norms that restricted women's access to education, she expresses a deep longing to learn. This desire for education becomes the driving force behind her narrative, leading her to acquire literacy and engage in intellectual pursuits.

**2. Challenging Patriarchal Norms:**

Rassundari Debi's desire for education challenges the patriarchal norms that confined women to domestic roles and denied them agency. Her determination to pursue knowledge transcends societal expectations, and she is willing to overcome obstacles, including opposition from her own family, in order to fulfill her transgressive desires.

**3. Pursuit of Spiritual Enlightenment:**

Rassundari Debi's narrative also reflects her desire for spiritual growth and enlightenment. Her devotion to God and her yearning for a deeper understanding of spirituality go beyond the boundaries set for women's religious engagement. Her spiritual journey becomes a significant aspect of her life narration, showcasing her desire to transcend traditional limitations.

**4. Agency and Self-Expression:**

Rassundari Debi's decision to write her autobiography itself reflects her desire for self-expression and agency. Writing her life story allows her to assert her identity and experiences in a society that often silenced women's voices. Her narrative becomes a platform through which she asserts her individuality and communicates her transgressive desires.

**5. Assertion of Personal Freedom:**

By sharing her life experiences, Rassundari Debi asserts her right to live life on her terms, despite societal constraints. Her story becomes a testament to her resilience, courage, and her unwavering commitment to fulfilling her desires, even in the face of adversity.

In "Amar Jiban," Rassundari Debi's transgressive desires are not only central to her narrative but also symbolic of her broader struggle against the confines of a patriarchal society. Her experiences serve as a window into the challenges faced by women of her time who dared to challenge societal norms and claim agency over their lives. By sharing her story, Rassundari Debi's autobiography becomes a powerful testament to the strength of individual desires and the potential for personal transformation even within a restrictive environment.

**Q5. Why does Simone de Beauvoir call women "the second sex"? Do you agree with this view?**

**Ans.** Simone de Beauvoir famously referred to women as "the second sex" in her groundbreaking work of feminist philosophy titled "The Second Sex." This concept captures her analysis of how women have historically been relegated to a secondary and subordinate status in comparison to men. Her exploration of this idea delves into the social, cultural, and existential factors that have contributed to the systematic oppression and marginalization of women. **Let's delve into why de Beauvoir used this term and consider different perspectives on this view:**

**Why Simone de Beauvoir Calls Women "the Second Sex":**

**Historical and Social Context:** De Beauvoir's analysis of history and society reveals that women have often been positioned as secondary to men. Throughout history, women's rights, roles, and opportunities have been restricted and defined in relation to men.

**Existentialist Framework:** De Beauvoir's existentialist philosophy emphasizes the importance of self-definition and autonomy. She argues that women have been denied this autonomy and have been treated as "the Other" in relation to men, leading to their secondary status.

**Economic and Political Factors:** De Beauvoir notes that women's economic and political dependence on men has reinforced their secondary status. Economic disparities, lack of access to education, and limited opportunities have contributed to women's subordination.

**Reproductive Role:** De Beauvoir discusses how women's reproductive functions have been used to define their roles, often limiting their options and self-determination. This biological determinism has contributed to their categorization as the "second sex."

**Agreeing or Disagreeing with the View:**

**Agreeing or disagreeing with de Beauvoir's view depends on one's perspective and understanding of gender dynamics:**

**Agree:**

1. Many feminists and scholars agree with de Beauvoir's analysis, as historical and contemporary evidence supports the notion that women have been systematically disadvantaged and oppressed in various societies.
2. The term "the second sex" can serve as a provocative call to action, urging society to recognize and rectify gender inequalities.
3. De Beauvoir's work has been influential in raising awareness about the ways in which women's roles and rights have been constrained by societal structures.

**Disagree:**

1. Some argue that while de Beauvoir's analysis is relevant to many contexts, it might not fully capture the experiences of all women. Cultural, historical, and individual differences can lead to diverse gender dynamics.
2. The label "the second sex" might oversimplify the complexity of women's experiences, potentially reducing them to a singular narrative of victimization.
3. Modern feminism has expanded the discourse to include various gender identities and intersections, emphasizing that gender inequality affects people in different ways.

**In conclusion**, Simone de Beauvoir's term "the second sex" encapsulates her analysis of how women have been historically marginalized and subordinated to men. Whether one agrees with this view or not depends on the recognition of gender inequalities and the broader understanding of how gender dynamics operate in different societies and contexts.

**Q6. "Fefu and her Friends" throws light on the debates surrounding the feminist movement around the time of its publication. Discuss.**

**Ans.** "Fefu and Her Friends" by María Irene Fornés is a play that emerged during a period of significant social and feminist activism in the 1970s. The play addresses themes related to feminism, gender roles, and women's empowerment, reflecting the debates and concerns surrounding the feminist movement during the time of its publication. **Here's how "Fefu and Her Friends" engages with these debates:**

**1. Exploration of Women's Relationships:**

The play presents a diverse group of women and their interactions, shedding light on the complexities of women's relationships. The characters' discussions, conflicts, and collaborations reflect the evolving nature of female friendships and solidarity during a time when feminist movements were advocating for women's rights and autonomy.

**2. Challenging Gender Norms:**

"Fefu and Her Friends" challenges traditional gender norms and expectations. The characters engage in discussions about marriage, motherhood, and personal aspirations, questioning the societal norms that defined women's roles and identities. This mirrors the feminist movement's push to challenge and redefine gender roles and stereotypes.

**3. Diversity of Feminist Perspectives:**

The play presents a range of perspectives on feminism. Different characters express their views on women's liberation, highlighting the diverse nature of the feminist movement itself. This mirrors the real-world debates within feminism about the prioritization of certain issues and strategies.

**4. Representation of Women's Experiences:**

Through the characters' conversations and monologues, the play addresses issues such as sexuality, identity, and autonomy. These discussions reflect the broader feminist push to acknowledge and validate women's diverse experiences, including those that had been marginalized or ignored.

**5. Critique of Patriarchy:**

The play critiques patriarchal power dynamics and their impact on women's lives. The characters' frustrations, confrontations, and desires for agency mirror the feminist movement's criticism of a system that perpetuates inequality and oppression.

#### **6. Blurring of Public and Private Spheres:**

The play challenges the traditional boundaries between public and private spaces. The immersive structure, with scenes taking place in different rooms, reflects the idea that women's personal lives are interconnected with larger societal issues. This resonates with feminist debates about how women's personal experiences are linked to broader structural inequalities.

#### **7. Complex Female Characters:**

"Fefu and Her Friends" offers nuanced female characters with distinct personalities and aspirations. This reflects the feminist movement's emphasis on recognizing the complexity and agency of women, countering simplistic and limiting portrayals.

**In summary**, "Fefu and Her Friends" engages with the debates surrounding the feminist movement of its time by portraying diverse female characters who challenge gender norms, critique patriarchy, and engage in discussions about women's rights and autonomy. The play's exploration of women's relationships, perspectives, and experiences reflects the complexities and diversity of the feminist movement during the 1970s.