

BEGC-106
Popular Literature
Assignment July 2025 & January 2026 Sessions
(Based on Blocks 1 - 4)

Max. Marks: 100

Answer all questions.

Section A

Write short notes in about 100 words each:

4 × 5 = 20

1.
 - (i) Genres of Popular Literature
 - (ii) Young Adult Fiction
 - (iii) *Bildungsroman*
 - (iv) New Wave Science Fiction

Section B

Answer the following in about 300 words each:

16 X 5 = 80

2. Discuss the theoretical underpinnings of crime fiction with suitable examples.
3. Write a detailed note on Graphic Novels taking *Bhimayana* as an example.
4. Analyse the significance of the Lion and the Unicorn in *Through the Looking Glass*.
5. Does Popular Literature have a relationship with gender politics? Discuss giving examples.

Assignment Reference Material (July 2025 – Jan 2026)

BEGC-106

Popular Literature

Note: This assignment is for students only. It is not for sale, distribution, or re-upload on any media platform or website. All rights are reserved by "Gullybaba.com". Sharing, copying, or uploading this material without permission is illegal and may result in legal action. You will be solely responsible for any consequences arising from such actions. If you have an official permission letter from us, only then are you allowed to upload or use this file.

Section A

1. Write short notes in about 100 words each:

(i) Genres of Popular Literature

Ans. One of the earliest genres to be relegated to the realm of popular literature was the romance. The so-called 'kitchen-maid romances,' often written by women, were dismissed as lacking seriousness. The other prevalent romantic story narrated the difficulties faced by two young people engaged in a forbidden love. The second genre that found much favour with the populace was the fantasy. Children's Literature, the most famous story being Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll is also considered as a representative fantasy, the other being science fiction. Issac Asimov remains the master storyteller of these stories of scientific adventures and make-believe kingdoms. In America it was the cowboy cult stories, the Westerns, set in the frontier which were hugely popular with the masses. These were tales of travel, power, male valour and discovery. Their rise in the late 19th century coalesced with the popularity of the murder/ crime stories or mysteries and spy fiction. With a detective in the centre, mysteries created world famous characters such as Auguste Dupin by Edgar Allan Poe and Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle. Yet, it is Agatha Christie who continues to remain the queen of crime till today. In India, Satyajit Ray created his own magic with the Feluda stories. The Spy Fiction as a genre was born with Fennimore Cooper but further became popular with the creation of the figure of James Bond by Ian Fleming in the mid 20th century. In recent times, popular literature has embraced a variety of interesting new forms of writing such as comic books, cartoon strips, terribly tiny tales, graphic novels etc which feed on mythology, folk legends, fables and myths of the time.

(ii) Young Adult Fiction

Ans. Young adult (YA) fiction refers to literature written primarily for readers between the ages of 13 and 19, and sometimes up to 21. This genre was created to bridge the gap between children's literature, aimed at readers under 12–13 years, and the more mature fiction typically read by adults. The subject matter and genres of YA correlate with the age and experience of the protagonist. Many young adult novels feature coming – of – age stories such as the classic example *The Cather in the Rye* by J D Salinger (1951). Young Adult Fiction deals with themes of adolescents comes to terms with themselves, their friendships, their romantic and sexual interests, overcoming personal problems; learning to take responsibility for their actions, friendship, getting into trouble, family life, self identity, individuality and sometimes even life and death situations, while focusing on real-life experiences and problems. *The Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth: *Divergent* (2011); *Insurgent* (2012); *Allegiant* (2013); the Stephenie Meyers *Twilight* Series: *Twilight* (2005); *New Moon* (2006); *Eclipse* (2007); *Breaking Dawn* (2008); *The Host* (2008); amongst other popular novels.

(iii) Bildungsroman

Ans. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines a bildungsroman as a class of novel that depicts and explores the manner in which the protagonist develops morally and psychologically. The German word Bildungsroman means “novel of education” or “novel of formation.” The traditional bildungsroman ends on a positive note. Some great examples of bildungsroman are: *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte, *Great Expectations* (1861) by Charles Dickens, *Anne of Green Gables* (1908) by Lucy Maud Montgomery, *Sons and Lovers* (1913) by D H Lawrence, *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) by J D Salinger, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee, *Black Swan Green* (2006) by David Mitchell, and *Skippy Dies* (2010) by Paul Murray.

(iv) New Wave Science Fiction

Ans. According to Moorcock (1979), New Wave science fiction, despite its often bleak and pessimistic plotlines, “ushered SF into the realms of serious literature.” Without losing its concern for scientific epistemology, New Wave SF sought to reflect on the issues most significant for modern society. Termed both elitist (Spinrad 1990) and as deeply connected with strands of popular culture, New Wave SF brought in a wave of experimentation and innovation for a literary product restrained by pseudo-scientific thought experiments. The writers and critics most associated with this SF (Judith Merrill, Moorcock) questioned “the format and ideology of traditional SF plotlines” of pulp fiction and sought to move beyond the space exploration stories of Golden Age fictions (Hard SF of 1950s) “to the creation of new states of mind, new states of awareness” (Latham 2011). Writers experimented with both form and content

of SF and capitalized on the youth counterculture of the 1960s, anti-war activism, second wave feminism and ecological crisis; themes of alternative gender politics, rejection of the traditional white, male subject of the pulp fictions, interrogations of power networks and configurations in every form and variable of society redefined the shape of SF itself.

Section B

Answer the following in about 300 words each:

Q2. Discuss the theoretical underpinnings of crime fiction with suitable examples.

Ans. While critics such as Rzepka have highlighted the ambiguity in the nature and representation of crime in such fiction, many scholars have nonetheless attempted to categorize crime and detective fiction within specific frameworks. Ranging from such fiction being categorised as secondary or of low artistic merit than mainstream literature; or crime narratives as being distinct from literary studies; the fictional representation of crime and detection has provided one of the most fascinating studies on social relationships and its disruption.

Scholarly discussions on crime and detective fiction over these last hundred years or so can be categorised into majorly three theoretical frameworks: first, the study of the narrative structure of this genre, second, as a reflection of societal and political ethos, and lastly, as psychological narratives.

The first framework or the narrative study of plot and the structure of these fiction sought to reflect on the nature of detective stories. Golden Age detective fiction, for instance, adheres to a formula where narratives begin with a mysterious crime and conclude with its logical resolution. As Heta Pyrhönen notes, the “whodunit” genre unfolds backwards, establishing a coherent sequence that explains an initially baffling situation. The principle of “fair play,” in which readers are offered clues alongside the detective, reinforces the genre’s uniqueness. Structuralist critics such as Carl Malmgren and Hilfer further distinguished between traditions: British detective fiction often reflects a stable, ordered society, while American hard-boiled narratives depict a more fluid and uncertain world.

The second framework situates crime fiction within its socio-political context. Early critics such as G.K. Chesterton defended the genre as a celebration of civilization against the chaos of crime. Later scholars, including Stephen Knight and Denis Porter, emphasized how detective narratives legitimized law, justice, and dominant social ideologies. Detective stories thus function as cultural artifacts that reflect, and often reinforce, prevailing values. With the rise of feminist and postcolonial criticism in the 1980s, the genre was further interrogated for its representations of gender, race, and class, highlighting its role in both sustaining and challenging power structures.

The third framework views crime fiction through psychology. W.H. Auden likened detective plots to Greek tragedy, arguing that their structure—ignorance, discovery, and reversal—creates a cathartic effect for readers. Detective fiction, in this sense, allows engagement with guilt, violence, and social disruption within safe narrative boundaries. John Cawelti described such stories as “moral fantasies” that permit readers to experience socially unacceptable impulses. Importantly, while classic detective stories emphasize resolution, crime fiction often shifts focus from “who dunit” to “why dunit,” examining the criminal mind and the instability of identity.

Later developments, such as Umberto Eco’s postmodern approach in *The Name of the Rose* (1980), further expanded the genre’s theoretical scope. For Eco, detective fiction is a philosophical game, less about solving crime and more about speculating on meaning in a chaotic world.

Q3. Write a detailed note on Graphic Novels taking Bhimayana as an example.

Ans. Graphic novels are a powerful medium that blends visual art with narrative storytelling. Unlike traditional comics, often linked with superheroes or mass entertainment, graphic novels have evolved into a serious literary form that engages with historical, social, and political concerns. *Bhimayana*, though officially described as a “graphic book” in its publishing details, is widely regarded and read within the broader category of graphic novels. In addition to English, it has been translated into Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Kannada, and Malayalam. As S. Anand points out, the work aims to awaken non-Dalits and privileged castes to the harsh realities of caste oppression. Beyond serving as a wake-up call against entrenched prejudices—and as a pedagogical tool—its use of Gond art illustrations profoundly transforms *Bhimayana*, giving the narrative a distinctive visual and emotional impact.

Graphic novels usually follow a pattern of sequential art. However, in *Bhimayana*, sequential art is done away with. The panels are not rigidly demarcated, they flow conveying a sense of rhythmic movement of time and the ways in which Gond worldview is imagined and expressed. It also enables a visual scanning of multiple instances. The narrative is arranged in such a way that events, thoughts, reflections and newspaper reports are placed together to enable a composite meaning and not merely a sequential one. The title suggests a narration of Bhim’s life, just as the *Ramayana* narrates the life of Rama. *Bhimayana* is based on the text, *Ambedkar: Autobiographical Notes* also a Navayana publication indicating that the storyboard is intended to be faithful to the original. These notes appear in a segment entitled “Waiting for a Visa” comprising of six ‘autobiographical illustrations’ in a multi volume work *Ambedkar: Writing and Speeches* edited by Vasant Moon.

It is conjectured that there may have been more such reminiscences probably lost. The link between the title and the illustrations is not defined. The *Mahad Satyagraha*, the Ambedkar-Gandhi debate and the conversion to Buddhism have been incorporated to

give a sense of completion to this book. As a biography, the graphic representation of selected events in the life of an individual focuses on the struggles against oppression. The word 'graphic' here implies the visual aspect of the chosen medium and also a detailed description of caste based discriminations. The events and their experiences however, are not limited to an individual but extend to a disfranchised community. The relation between the historical conditions and the life of the individual is also probed. Events are mentioned alongwith the years of occurrence. Experiences are recounted through memory burdened by the inheritance of caste discriminations. The unshaped, scattered and fragmentary nature of memory is expressed through the graphic narrative highlighting its co-existence with reflections on the same observes, Pramod K Nayar in "Radical Graphics: Martin Luther King, Jr., B R Ambedkar, and Comics Auto/Biography".

Bhimayana can be read as an alternative history that highlights Ambedkar's relentless struggles against caste and untouchability, situating caste firmly within contemporary discourse. The recurring image of the 'pointed finger,' first seen on the book's cover, symbolizes exclusion and the direct targeting of individuals through caste-based discrimination. As Pramod K. Nayar observes in *Towards a Post-colonial Critical Literacy: Bhimayana and the Indian Graphic Novel*, the text employs multiple modes such as dialogues, written statements, thoughts, newspaper articles, and headlines without privileging any single one. Instead, all voices are incorporated as equally significant. Having examined the cover design and the central debates within *Bhimayana*, it is now pertinent to turn to the detailing of Gond art, which profoundly shapes the book's visual and narrative structure.

Q4. Analyse the significance of the Lion and the Unicorn in Through the Looking Glass.

Ans. In the next square, Alice encounters the White King's messengers, Hatta and Haiga, who are counterparts of the Mad Hatter and the March Hare from *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. The messenger informs the King that the Lion and the Unicorn are fighting for his crown. Their animosity is drawn from a famous nursery rhyme. Traditionally, the Lion and the Unicorn appeared on the coats of arms of England and Scotland in the 12th century, symbolizing the historical rivalry between the two nations.

At another level, the episode with the lion and unicorn carries a topical reference. Political cartoonist and illustrator of Alice books, John Tenniel, who was famous for his *Punch* magazine cartoons as a political satirist, fabulises the lion and the unicorn to caricature two famous politicians of his day—William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli. These animals are not any generic lion and unicorn but carry a reference to the contemporary politics of Carroll's age, where Tenniel shows the confrontation between the liberal Whigs and the conservative Tories of his age by making the Unicorn look like Disraeli while the lion is made to resemble Gladstone. These two

politicians battled through Queen Victoria's reign and were always sparring with each other. Though Queen Victoria was personally fond of Disraeli, it was lion Gladstone that "beat the Unicorn all around the town" and had a longer stint as the nation's Prime Minister. The Cake symbolically represents the united electoral mandate that chose Gladstone, who succeeded Disraeli and served as the Prime Minister for twelve years. The two political contenders are depicted as the rational Gladstone and the irrational Unicorn, both of whom desire a larger electoral slice of the national pie. There is a role reversal when Disraeli—the unreal unicorn, himself known for his unrealistic ideologies, ironically, calls Alice a "fabulous monster". Then there is the difficulty of cutting the cake which proves to be a difficult exercise as the slices of cut cake fuse together time and again, despite Alice's repeated slicing. The Unicorn explains that in the world of the Looking-Glass, the cake must first be passed around and only then cut. Once distributed, the cake miraculously divides itself into three portions—figuratively symbolizing the United Kingdom of Wales, Scotland, and England, as well as the collective electoral mandate of the Britons.

Q5. Does Popular Literature have a relationship with gender politics? Discuss giving examples.

Ans. Popular literature has always played a crucial role in both reinforcing and challenging societal gender norms. Twenty-first-century writings, in particular, reflect the paradigm shifts surrounding gender and sexuality. One sub-genre that has gained immense popularity in recent decades is "Chick Lit," which typically portrays single women in their twenties or thirties navigating life in urban metropolises while balancing the demands of professional careers and personal relationships. Chick

Lit is a huge departure from the more traditional representations of women tinged with passivity and domesticity. In Chick Lit, the female characters are independent, ambitious, and they simultaneously seek romantic relationships. As with several other forms of popular genre fiction, Chick Lit is often derided as formulaic, trashy literature. However, its unprecedented popularity deserves to be studied as a cultural and academic phenomenon.

Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary* and HBO's *Sex and the City* are often regarded as the precursors of this genre. Critics like Stephanie Harzewski believe that Chick Lit borrows elements from Jane Austen's novel and the novel of manners of the eighteenth century. Novels categorised as Chick Lit are often characterised by a certain sense of intimacy and candor because of the use of the diary form of writing or the confessional first-person narrative. They reflect the lives of the modern-day woman the anxieties, desires and conflicts faced by her. While a majority of criticism has centred on the literary merit of such novels, it is perhaps more productive to study them as reflections of gender politics of the contemporary age. The popularity of Chick Lit has been analysed as a "refeminization" of sorts (Dowd) which leads to the formation of a "woman's culture" (Berlant) as it functions as a "commodified genre of

intimacy” (Berlant). In other words, Chick Lit allows women to share their experiences with others and develop a collective of feelings and emotions.

This form of writing also raises several questions about the status of feminism as a political philosophy. Instead of championing the women’s cause and fighting for equality and justice, Chick Lit is more invested in portraying the real struggles faced by women in this day and age. This is also resonant of post feminism, defined as a sensibility constituted by a number of inter-related themes concerning gender relations (Gill). Gill argues that we have reached a stage where no single, authoritative definition of feminism exists. Instead, multiple interpretations of feminism can coexist within the same framework. Within this paradigm, Chick Lit has been examined as a form of writing in which women’s representation is not confined by the strictures of either feminism or patriarchy. It seeks to capture the authenticity of women’s lived experiences while simultaneously engaging with questions of sexuality, identity, and agency.

Gullybaba.com

गुल्लीबाबा
1ST CHOICE OF IGNOU STUDENTS