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

**B.A. EJP – VI SEMESTER—END-SEMESTER EXAMINATION: APRIL 2019**

**OE 6313: South Asian Literatures II**

This paper contains **THREE** pages and **THREE** sections

**Time- 2 1/2 hrs Max Marks-70 marks**

**I.A. Read the following extract and answer the following questions. (2X15= 30 marks)**

During the Kolkata launch of my new book, the knowledgeable Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee (ex-director of the National Book Trust) posed a very pertinent question. “So are we saying diaspora literature is soon going to be obsolete?” he asked, during a delightfully literary conversation at the Oxford Bookstore on Park Street last week.

The notion of home, whether understood as material dwelling places, geographical locations, socio-psychic identities, or other real and imagined categories of belonging, has long fascinated writers and critics. Many of us have analysed diaspora literature, its creative engagement with shifting borders and the poignant themes of difference and assimilation it engenders. Once, during a university classroom screening of The Namesake, a film based on Jhumpa Lahiri’s novel by the same name, I noticed some of my students stealing surreptitious glances at me. Not the look of familiarity usually reserved for me, but a glance of doubt, sudden astonishment, incomprehension, even guilt. “Did you feel lost like Ashima when you first travelled to the West?” a student asked me over coffee later, compassion in her eyes. In The Namesake, Ashima, the character played to perfection by Tabu, has an arranged marriage in Kolkata and accompanies her academic husband to America, struggling to fit into her adoptive land, feeling increasingly alienated from her children who identify as modern Americans. “Not as much,” I confessed. Travel is always complicated business, but women travellers of our generation rarely have the luxury of feeling lost. One identifies with Ashima’s visceral insight into the opacity of cultures and all that is lost in translation. That said, the experiences of single, modern women are different from those like Ashima, who migrated with their families in earlier generations and experience a higher degree of discomfort with food and forms of dress, a stronger sense of anomie amidst different cultural norms.

Lahiri’s novel about the South Asian-American experience was preceded by several other authors who had also written about the diaspora, gender relations and the East-West cultural encounter. For instance, Kamala Markandaya, who made Britain her home after Independence, received critical acclaim for her novel Nectar in a Sieve (1955). Nayantara Sehgal’s Rich Like Us (1985) juxtaposed a British immigrant’s struggle to find a sense of home in India alongside an Oxford-returned Indian civil servant’s own search for home against a backdrop of the political upheaval of the Emergency. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s short story collection Arranged Marriage (1995) and Meena Alexander’s Manhattan Music (1997) were later additions to South Asian diaspora literature, exploring culture clash, hyphenated identities and divided loyalties.

Though hybridity of matter and form is usually the norm in literatures of the diaspora, the diaspora by definition presupposes a homeland, an adopted land, and a difficult dialogue between the two. What makes the question of the continuing relevance of diaspora literature so interesting is that it is sustained by a clear distinction between the nivasi (resident)and the pravasi (expatriate), as well as a series of other unproductive binaries such as the creative versus imitative, English versus vernacular. But such distinctions can no longer hold to the same degree, I contend. This is not to say that diaspora literature will cease to serve as a useful analytical category within literary studies, but that literary representations and analyses will increasingly reflect more complex, contemporary realities pertaining to travel: the reality of globalisation, of evolving economics, mutating geographies, massive multi-way global flows of ideas, goods, people. As a character in my novel says, “Diasporas are a thing of the past, the ancient homeland versus the land of exile. Now the globe is shrinking so close we all need to be travellers, at home anywhere in the world.”

1. How do you distinguish between the questions of exile/ home in early diasporic literature vs more recent ones. Illustrate with examples from the text.
2. The author says, “Though hybridity of matter and form is usually the norm in literatures of the diaspora, the diaspora by definition presupposes a homeland, an adopted land, and a difficult dialogue between the two”. Illustrate with the help of a text you have read this semester.

**II. Read this except from the Hindu and answer the following questions.**

**(2X15= 30 marks)**

For newly independent nations, the choice of an official, national language was crucial, and often controversial, made especially so in the context of polyphonic and geographically diverse countries like China, India, and Indonesia.

In China, the Communist Party, opted for Putonghua, or Mandarin, the language of the capital, Beijing. In India, the initial intention of the postcolonial state — to adopt Hindi as the national language — was abandoned, and instead a plurality of languages were granted recognition.

The divergent linguistic paths followed by China and India can be explained in part by the fact that the majority of Chinese languages, unlike their Indian counterparts, are united by a common writing system, making the imposition of a single language for all China more palatable.

But the sprawling archipelago of Indonesia, an agglomeration of over 17,000 islands, which are home to some 700 languages, many of which do not share scripts or linguistic roots, is more directly comparable to India. However, Indonesia too, chose to adopt a single national language: Bahasa Indonesia.

The idea that a “nation” requires a national language to act as a social glue is hardly uncommon, but what makes Bahasa Indonesia noteworthy is that it was neither the language of the majority of Indonesian citizens, nor of its political elite. Those labels belonged to Javanese, a language spoken by the majority of the inhabitants of Java, Indonesia’s most populous island and the centre of gravity of its nationalist movement.

The Republic of Indonesia consequently made an unusual decision when it bypassed its majority language, Javanese, in favour of a variety of Malay, whose standardised form was dubbed Bahasa Indonesia or the language of Indonesia. The many Javanese nationalists involved in the discussions at the time not only acquiesced but actively advocated Bahasa Indonesia as the logical choice for a national language.

Goenawan Mohamad, the grand old man of Indonesian journalism and one of the country’s leading poets, explains that Malay had functioned as a lingua franca across the archipelago for centuries. By the time it was officially adopted by the nationalist movement in 1928, it had already emerged as a rallying symbol of resistance to colonial politics. “Bahasa Indonesia was intertwined with national identity from early on in the nationalist struggle,” Goenawan says.

1. Comment on the “idea that a “nation” requires a national language to act as a social glue”. Argue for or against based on your readings on the language debate in India.
2. Account for the diversity in language and religion in South Asia and the right to dissent based on your readings this semester.
3. **Discuss any ONE film text you have come across this semester and comment on its depiction of the nation state. (10 marks)**

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