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

MA ENGLISH – I SEMESTER

SEMESTER EXAMINATION: OCTOBER 2021

(Examination conducted in March 2022)

**EN 7218 - Indian Literatures – I**

**Time 2.5 HOURS MAX. MARKS 70**

**This Question Paper Contains THREE Printed Pages and TWO Parts**

**SECTION-A**

**I. Read this excerpt from Rosinka Chaudhuri’s introduction to *A History of Indian Poetry in English*:**

Homi Bhabha has called Naipaul’s fictional Trinidadians “vernacular cosmopolitans of a kind, moving in-between cultural traditions, and revealing hybrid forms of life and art that do not have a prior existence within the discrete world of any single culture or language,” relating them to his own “growing up in Bombay as a middle-class Parsi,” “learning to work with the contradictory strains of languages lived, and languages learned, [which] has the potential for a remarkable critical and creative impulse.”

While the condition of vernacular cosmopolitanism is one which he himself (as indeed do many of us) shares to a greater or lesser degree, what is far more surprising in the context of Bhabha is his fervent declaration elsewhere in an interview: “I was absolutely convinced in those days [Bombay in the’70s] that my great gift was to be a poet ... It was my all-embracing, all-absorbing passion.”

This incongruous example is invoked here in order to point toward the power of the moment of the rebirth of modern Indian poetry in English, to show how pervasive and persuasive the space and place of the regeneration of this corpus had been. Bombay in the ’70s, with Dom Moraes, Nissim Ezekiel, Arun Kolatkar,Dilip Chitre, Adil Jussawalla, Eunice de Souza, Gieve Patel, and the itinerant Arvind Krishna Mehrotra and Kamala Das, was where Indian poetry in English was reborn in an independent, impoverished country, irritated with and deliberately forgetful of its colonial modern ancestry that could be traced back to Calcutta in the fecund nineteenth century. Just as the Bombay Progressive Artists’ Group turned impatiently away from the pioneers in the Bengal School of Art, the poets too, often personal friends with the “progressive artists,” began a conversation with American and European poets, with regional and Dalit poets (Dilip Chitre’s collaboration with Namdeo Dhasal comes readily to mind), with what Bhabha calls “the full clamour of contemporary experience,” with, in the words Bhabha cites of Auden’s, “the democratic aspect of literary creation.”

**I.A. Answer ANY THREE of the following questions based on the passage in about ten sentences each: (3x5=15)**

1. While the word 'vernacular' can mean native to a country, it is often seen as patronising and dismissive, perhaps because of its history. It comes from the Latin *vernaculus* meaning "domestic, native, indigenous; pertaining to home-born slaves," derived ultimately from an Etruscan word *verna*, meaning "home-born slave". If you could pick an alternative to the term that would do justice to the Indian writer, what would you choose? Why?
2. In what sense do you normally use/understand the word cosmopolitan? Does that sense apply here in the passage? Explain.
3. Is the distinction between languages lived and learned an operative one in your case? How does this play out in terms of reading, writing and thinking?
4. As somebody who is beginning to form an acquaintance with literary history, how would you respond to a sentence such as "Indian poetry in English was reborn in an independent, impoverished country, irritated with and deliberately forgetful of its colonial modern ancestry that could be traced back to Calcutta in the fecund nineteenth century"?

**II. Annotate the following excerpts with specific reference to the questions that are given. Your responses should not exceed two paragraphs each: (2x10=20)**

1. Her voice is oatmeal and honey.
2. Identify the poem, and the poet. What preceding idea does this line refer to? Comment also on the literary device visible in the line.
3. All brothers—

Though some are having funny habits

1. Identify the poem, and the poet. Comment on the immediate part of the conversation that this line refers to. What effort on the part of the writer is visible here?

**III. Answer ANY TWO of the following in about 250 words each: (2x10=20)**

1. Raja Rao once wrote “We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. Our method of expression... has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colourful as the Irish and the American. Time alone will justify it.” How kind has time been to the style he favours in *Kanthapura*? Compare and contrast this attempt at finding a style and a form appropriate to the Indian context with R.K. Narayan’s *Swami and Friends*.
2. What does a reading of Gauri Viswanathan’s *Masks of Conquest* do for the Indian student of Literature?
3. What were your primary responses while reading *My Story* by Kamala Das? Do they lead in any way to an understanding of how she attempts to reset the rules for writing autobiography?

**IV. Read this poem titled *Coming of Age in a Convent School* by Anjum Hasan and respond to the question that follows:**

The year is 1985

and Phoebe comes to class wearing a golden wig.

A group of girls walk around school with moles

carefully drawn above their lips in blue ballpoint ink.

They’re in love with Madonna.

This is the year that Sister Carmel, our English teacher,

will refuse to believe that Boy George is not a woman,

the year she will talk animatedly about Live Aid.

This year everyone loves the sex education class

but pretends not to.

Sister Monica shows us a film in the library

about an American teenager whom everybody bullies

because he’s still a virgin.

The point of the film is that he’s a winner nevertheless,

and can’t be cowed down.

Next year Prisca will have a baby

but this year she giggles and squirms like everyone else,

and when the girl I sit with stains her overall,

I’m so utterly envious.

I long to be part of this sisterhood.

This is the year of George Michael’s stubble,

the year of Stevie Wonder jokes.

This is the year I realise that there are only,

only women in the entire school building

and am astonished at the thought.

1. What does the phrase Coming of Age normally represent? What does the poem do to this understanding? What else does the poem do for the reader? Reflect also on whether there are specific aspects that strike you as being poetic. Your answer should not exceed 250 words. **(15 marks)**