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**SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING:
CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

B.E.G.C.- 132

B.A. General - 2nd Semester

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Based on

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I.G.N.O.U.

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Content

SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Question Paper–June-2023 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper–December-2022 (Solved)	1-2
Question Paper–Exam Held in March-2022 (Solved)	1-3
Question Paper–Exam Held in February-2021 (Solved)	1-2
Sample Question Paper–1 (Solved)	1-2

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
1.	'Propositions' by Sujit Mukherjee	1
2.	'The Mad Lover' by Sisir Kumar Das	14
3.	Bhakti and Sufi Movements in Medieval India	22
4.	Baul Gaan, Akka Mahadevi and Meerabai	39
5.	Understanding the Nature of Language	49
6.	'Ghazal' by Amir Khusrau and 'Hindi' by Raghuvir Sahay	57
7.	M.K. Naik and The Issue of Language	66
8.	'Mother Tongue' by Padma Sachdev; 'Passage To America' by K. Ayyappa Panikar	74

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Chapterwise Reference Book</i>	<i>Page</i>
9.	Dalit Voices	82
10.	Dalit Voices – Poetry	90
11.	Literature From North East India	98
12.	Literature From North East India – Poetry	107
13.	A Woman’s Retelling of the Rama – Tale: <i>The Chandrabati Ramayana</i>	115
14.	Lakshmi Kannan and Indira Sant: Poems	123
15.	Naseem Shafaie: Poems	132
16.	‘Sapavimochanam’ (‘The Redemption’) by Pudhumaipithan	142



**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
Sample Question
Papers**

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: B.E.G.C.-132 CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: (i) Answer five questions in all. (ii) Q. No. 1 is compulsory. (iii) All questions carry equal marks.

Q. 1. Answer, with reference to the context, any four of the following:

- (a) Neither among the sinners nor the saints
I am neither happy nor unhappy
I belong neither to water nor to the earth
I am neither fire nor air
I know not who I am

Ans. Context: These lines in the extract below are taken from ‘Kafi 7’ by Bulley Shah.

Explanation: The poet says “I know not who I am ... Nor am I born of Adam and Eve”. We only know our parents, but not God, our original ancestor, who created Adam and Eve, the progenitor. The logical reasoning for his ignorance about his identity is through yet another denial: Further the poet says “I belong neither to water nor to the earth; I am neither fire nor air”.

Human beings are aware of the five prime elements of nature – air, water, earth, fire and space (*vayu, jal, bhu, agni* and *akash*), but they go far beyond the five perceivable elements. In this context, the 19th Century English poet Wordsworth say.

The Soul that rises with us, our life’s Star,
Hath had elsewhere its setting...
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:
Heaven lies about us in our infancy! (“Ode on Intimations of Immortality”)

- (b) I love the Handsome One:
he has no death
decay nor form
no place or side
no end nor birthmarks.

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from ‘Vacana’ by Akka Mahadevi.

Explanation: The poem describes Shiva as a deity, handsome, immortal and one who has neither birth nor death. The poet says her love is unmediated. She loves him for His beauty without the intervention of any custom and convention of rituals and religious formalities.

Beauty is not interpreted as solely a physical attribute because no one has seen Shiva except as He appears in one’s imagination, inspired by passion and devotion. She compares him to white jasmine flower which is usually associated with love. Jasmine also symbolizes beauty and sensuality. In some cultures, it is used for appreciation and good luck. When used in religious ceremonies, jasmine represents purity and the meanings vary depending on the culture and setting. The poet associates jasmine with white colour. White jasmine flowers are mostly used in art and literature as a symbol of purity and innocence. White jasmine flowers are also used in wedding ceremonies where these symbolic meanings are perfect for the occasion. Jasmine is a perfect gift for a person whom one respects and has a high regard for. Hence, white jasmine is for Akka Mahadevi, none other than Shiva.

- (c) Forget me not, the sorrowful,
Talk to me with your eyes;
Dear heart,
I cannot bear the sorrow of parting,
Keep me well within your heart.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-6, Page No. 63, Q. No. 3.

- (d) No, I don’t work for a Shah
I said, but for a Shahni, very kind, very well
off

**And I am not the only one
Working for her
She has many servants
Ever ready to do her bidding**

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from 'Mother Tongue' by Podmia Sachdev'.

Explanation: Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 79, Q. No. 2.

**(e) These are the colours of destiny
of immutable truth
and the colours also
with which warring pawns
are daily decorating our towns.**

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from 'The Colors of Truth'.

Explanation: These are the colours of destiny/of immutable truth/ and the colours also/with which warring pawns /are daily decorating our towns: The poet says these colours are the colours of destiny and immutable truth. The red signifies life and black signifies death. Life and death are the colours of destiny as well as truth. The poet also conveys that the insurgents are the pawns in the hands of the warring parties. The poet highlights how the common people have been affected by the violence.

**(f) Her dream, like the dreams of a dozen other
women.
But she woke up before the dream began.
And then she never fell asleep again.**

Ans. Context: These lines are taken from *Her Dream* by Indira Sant.

Explanation: 'Her Dream' reflects the dream of a widow, who is treated cruelly by society and even by other married women. A widow is expected to wear dull colours, be humble, not enjoy life or eat lavish food and have personal desires and dreams. It is a realistic picture of an Indian widow. She is a human and she also sees dream, but she is restricted by the society not to see even dream which is contrary to the expectation of the society. A widow is also not invited to festivals and ceremonies like marriages – her presence is considered inauspicious. It is as if she is

responsible for her husband's death. Thus, widows are disillusioned and stop dreaming.

The poem, 'Her Dream', is realistic as it says that every woman has dreams and dreaming is not limited to married women alone. The woman here represents a typical Indian widow whose identity is lost after the death of her husband. Without a husband, she loses her social status and is unable to partake of the simple joys of life. The poet lists a widow's dreams. Her life is a stretch of hopelessness where there is no rest or serenity.

Q. 2. What are the similarities between Bhakti and Sufi poets/poetry? Illustrate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 17, Q. No. 2 and Q. No. 4, Chapter-4, Page No. 46, Q. No. 4.

Q. 3. What do you understand by 'Hindavi'? Explain with examples.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-5, Page No. 49, 'Excerpt : Understanding Hindavi'.

Q. 4. Discuss the significance of Indian writing in English in the socio-cultural context.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 68, 'Indian English: An Alternative Form of Expression'.

Q. 5. What do you understand by 'The Aesthetics of Dalit Literature'? Offer examples in support of your answer.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 87, Q. No. 4 and Chapter-10, Page No. 94, Q. No. 2.

Q. 6. How do various writers bring out the similarities in the Dalit experience? Illustrate.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 82, 'Introduction', Page No. 83, 'What is Dalit Literature?' and Chapter-10, Page No. 96, Q. No. 4.

Q. 7. Explain the importance of translation in the Indian context.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 103, Q. No. 3, Chapter-1, Page No. 12, Q. No. 6.

Q. 8. What are the themes and issues taken up by women in their writing? Give examples.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 138, Q. No. 5, Chapter-10, Page No. 91, 'Dalit Women Writers' and Page No. 97, Q. No. 6 and Chapter-14, Page No. 124, 'Understanding the Poem'.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

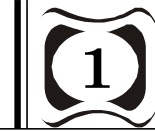
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SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: CULTURAL DIVERSITY



‘Propositions’ by Sujit Mukherjee

INTRODUCTION

Scholars point out that Indian universities have given step motherly treatment to Indian literary studies and traditions as compared to Western literature and culture. The reasons they highlight are: (i) Colonial hangover: We still love western culture and neglect Indian culture and literature. (ii) Emphasis on ‘modernity’: Indian literature is mistakenly considered as anti-modern. (iii) Advent of print technology: The privilege of written texts over the rich Indian oral literary traditions which include folk and tribal literature. (iv) Application of Western literary canons: This is not entirely relevant to Indian literature.

Analysis of the Points Listed in the Introduction

The perceived bias and discrimination against Indian tradition *vis-à-vis* western literature can be resolved by giving equal importance to both. A parallel study of the two can enrich and broaden our understanding. Both Indian literature and Western literature have distinctive traditions.

Besides, oral tradition and written texts are two different genres. Many classics from *The Iliad* to *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* were passed down orally before being written down. Two distinct genres enrich each other. Valmiki’s *Ramayana* in the oral tradition is as inspiring and poignant as Tulsidas’ *Ramcharitmanas* composed in Hindi/Awadhi and Rajagopalachari’s *Ramayana* in English. Many great poets such as: Kamban, Kritibhasa, Tulsidas and Eknath have composed and retold the story of the *Ramayana* in their own language. Oral tradition has been nurtured in Indian society and its tradition preserved in written texts.

Western literary canon refers to the Western literature and Western classical music and works of art

that represent high culture, the set of cultural products held in the highest esteem by the literate and aristocratic classes of Europe and North America. It is infeasible to apply Western canons to understand and assess Indian literature because Indian tradition and culture is different from that of the West.

Sujit Mukherjee’s essay ‘Propositions’ presents a different kind of literary history other than the chronological narrative of Western literature to inform the reader about the difference between the two distinctive literary traditions and find a new methodology to write the history of Indian literary tradition.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR, SUJIT MUKHERJEE

Sujit Mukherjee (1930-2003) was a prolific writer. He wrote in the area of Indian literary history and translation. He also translated books from Bangla into English which include Tagore’s *Gora* and Buddhadeva Bose’s *Mahabharater Katha*. His two works on Translation as Discovery and Translation as Recovery need special mention. The Tradition of Anglo-Indian Fiction and Towards a Literary History of India are his other works. He also wrote six books on cricket. The most famous of them is *The Autobiography of an Unknown Cricketer*.

SOME EXCERPTS FROM SUJIT MUKHERJEE’S ‘PROPOSITIONS’

Summary

- Sanskrit was the predominant language in India until about the 12th century. The diachronic strategy was valid then. Literary culture in India now shows the simultaneous presence of several literary languages. Thus, this diachronic strategy is no longer valid to study the trend.

2 / NEERAJ : SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- A literary culture of Indian not only includes the literary texts but also as an outcome of various other factors working at that time and place. After crossing the language barriers, the patterns of literary history in India can be read by re-arranging the available materials.
- Authors are also a matter of basic concern in Indian literary history because India literary heritage has texts of unknown authorship and authors of undiscovered texts.
- A study of how literary forms have moved around in India will make a viable unit of exploration for literary history. Like the literary forms, the literary conventions would be apparent when we pursue them from one language to another.
- A dominant language of literature gives us an obvious line of enquiry. If conventions have passed from one modern language to another that would give convincing grounds to regard all literature as a part of the same literary culture.

THE NEED FOR A NEW METHODOLOGY TO WRITE INDIAN LITERARY HISTORY

Sujit Mukherjee wants a new methodology to write the history of Indian Literature. History is a Greek term which means “to know”. History is both the act of inquiry and the findings from that inquiry. History relates to the accounts of events revealed from inquiries. Histories are records of events, personalities and happenings. There are various categories of history such as History of Wars, History of Nations, History of Religions, History of People, History of Races, History of Philosophy, History of Class Struggles, History of Empires and History of Science. History of Language and History of Literature are among the latest in the history of histories.

Where the language of the land is single and homogenous, it is easy to write the history of literature of that language or country. So, it has been easy to write a British, French, Spanish, Italian, and American History of Literature. Writing a History of Indian literature is not that easy because the country has a multiplicity of languages and a still greater multiplicity of dialects within each language. The Indian languages have multiple of dialects which influence each other and make a heterogeneous literary tradition. For example, Hindi has a dialect called Awadhi and Tulsidas blended the two and this helped Hindi to develop dynamically.

Sujit Mukherjee cites the example of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* which have been orally composed in many Indian dialects and written in almost all Indian languages with changes and embellishments to the original version. The *Ramayana* has been retold in in Kashmiri, Tamil, Malayalam, Telugu, Assamese, Bangla, Maithili and Odia. There are also Jain and Buddhist versions of the two epics. These developments have happened at different times which make it difficult to think of Indian literary history as a linear structure.

The Indian literary tradition is unique because it has many strands and it is not that easy to include all literary writings under a single literary tradition. We cannot speak of a single Indian literary tradition but multiple traditions where the literary cross currents flow due to constant and frequent changing of cultural frames. In this context, Sujit Mukherjee wants to formulate a new methodology to write the history of Indian literature. He seeks an appropriate critical approach that would reflect the unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Textual Analysis

Sujit Mukherjee takes the classical Sanskrit drama as an example language. Sanskrit drama employed three different usages for its three different types of characters. Sanskrit in its pristine form was employed by the royalty and the educated class of priests. *Prakrit*, a derivative of Sanskrit, was the natural language of the common people. Women were depicted as speaking Prakrit. The third form of Sanskrit, *Apabrahmasa* which means ‘Off standard’ in speech i.e., low literary language, was used by the common characters. Sujit Mukherjee says it is an index of a multilingual society. In ancient literary culture, as well as in the middle and modern periods, simultaneous development of many languages has happened.

Until the 12th century, Sanskrit was the dominant language. But from the 12th to the 20th century, many languages and their offshoots developed and any history of Indian literature should cover all the languages. Writing the history of Indian Language and Literature cannot be on Western lines. Sujit Mukherjee gives Tulsidas as an example. Tulsidas, who belongs to the medieval period, cannot be said as just a Hindi poet. Mukherjee writes: “First Tulsidas as a great poet of medieval India; second as great in the history of Hindi poetry; finally as a great poet of Indian literature.”

Thus, a comprehensive Indian literary history is different from the present volumes of history of

individual languages. The former is a consolidation of all language literatures to identify a literary culture and the latter is language-specific in terms of time, trends, growth and decline. Also, a literary culture cannot be formulated only through literary texts without taking into account other factors operating. For example, medieval arts and literature were greatly influenced by the mystic, Bhakti movement. An inter-disciplinary approach which identifies the influence of all artistic and aesthetic factors in the composition of a text will enable the historian to read new meanings into the literary past of India and discover new patterns of history of Indian literature.

Medieval Islamic Literature of the Indus region cannot be ignored. The texts may not be available in the originals, but the literary historian has to be content with translated versions. The literary historian does not try a comparative study of languages and literature, his concern is with the authors who have contributed to literature in any language. Details about the author are important for the literary historian as they will help to know the place of the author in our culture and thus relate the literary culture to the makers of our literature. In the early period, the belief was a writer had divine grace and therefore regarded as a creator of art and literature like God the Creator, but in the medieval age, a writer was both an artist and a member of the society and therefore his place in literary history has to factor in all these besides his literary output.

A literary text has to be considered in its two aspects: (i) the language in which it is written, and (ii) its form or genre. Literary form is not static. It gets adapted in other regions. This adaptation is prominent in certain categories like the *gatha* of Prakrit, the *pada* of Bangla, the *vacana* of Kannada. Several literary forms have emerged out of folk literature. Nazrul Islam's Ghazals in Bangla have been influenced by Persian and Urdu. He was a Muslim, but he composed songs on Hindu Goddess Kali. It shows Indian literature was never limited to religion. Indian novels written in different Indian languages also have social and political in content.

Literary forms which have developed through cross-fertilization also brought with them new literary conventions. Literary historians have to consider the links between one regional convention and another. It is not that the basic forms varied, but the conventions supporting the forms changed. These conventions lend themselves to comparable links, but there are many conventions that stand uniquely alone.

Today the influence of English and Western thought overshadows indigenous literature. Indian literature today has the trappings of Western culture. A literary historian of Indian literature has to take note of Western currents and an equally strong revival of our earlier conventions that are evidenced in modern Indian writing.

Older conventions have revived in areas where foreign influence is the most active, and the overlay of the new and the old has made it difficult than ever before to recognize the true identity of a current convention.

Indian Literature also has affiliation to tradition. Many literary texts in different Indian languages follow from the original text from which tradition has originated. *The Ramayanahas* given rise to a number of distinguished literary works in Indian languages spanning from Kashmir to Kerala, from Bengal to Gujarat, from Assam in the North-East to the other southern states of Andhra, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. *The Mahabharata* has also been a source book for many poets and playwrights to express through their poems and plays.

Sujit Mukherjee also gives the examples of *Puranas* such as Brahma, Pada, Vishnu, *Brahma-vaivrata* which have nourished the literature in all our languages, with plot and character, theme and structure, image and symbol and in many other ways. The Vedic hymns, the prose of the *Brahmanas* and the *Upanishad* also have influenced the Indian writings.

Thus, the literary historian of Indian literature must deal with the assets that have come down to us as heritage.

ACTIVITIES

Q. 1. How many versions of the *Ramayana*/*Mahabharata* have you come across in the written/oral/performative forms? Do you notice any changes from the original story? Make a note of what you think are different whether in terms of characterization or narrative.

Ans. *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are available in many written/oral/performative forms. Different versions of *The Ramayana* include *Ramcharitmanas* in Awadhi by Tulsī Das, *The Sri Ranganatha Ramayanam* in Telugu by Gona Budda Reddy, *The Bengali Krittivasi Ramayan* by Krittibas Ojha, *The Marathi Bhavartha Ramayana* written by Sant Eknath, *The Odia Dandi Ramayana* or *Jagamohan Ramayana* was adapted by Balaram Das and *The Tamil Kambaramayanam* by poet Kamban.

4 / NEERAJ : SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Many regional versions of *The Mahabharata* developed over time, mostly differing only in minor details, or with verses or subsidiary stories being added. These include the Tamil street theatre, *terukkuttu* and *kattaikkuttu*, the plays of which use themes from the Tamil language versions of *Mahabharata*, focusing on Draupadi. Outside the Indian subcontinent, in Indonesia, a version was developed in ancient Java as *Kakawin Bhâratayuddha* in the 11th century under the patronage of King Dharmawangsa (990-1016). A Persian translation of *Mahabharata*, titled *Razmnameh*, was produced at Akbar's orders, by Faizi and Abd al-Qadir Badayuni in the 18th century. The first complete English translation was the Victorian prose version by Kisari Mohan Ganguli, published between 1883 and 1896 (Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers) and by M. N. Dutt (Motilal Banarsidass Publishers). An early poetry translation by Romesh Chunder Dutt and published in 1898 condenses the main themes of the *Mahâbhârata* into English verse.

Some differences between Valmiki's *Ramayana* and *Ramcharitmanas* by Swami Tulsi Das are given below:

(i) Valmiki describes Rama as a human being whereas Tulsidas describes Rama as a *Maryada Purush*.

(ii) In *Ramcharitmanas*, the scene in which Kaikayi forces her husband to exile Rama is considerably longer and more psychological, with intense characterisation and brilliant similes.

(iii) Tulsidas did not include the killing of Bali. In original version, Rama did not challenge Bali to a face-to-face contest and chose to kill him from hiding while Bali and Sugreeva were engaged in a duel. Bali puts this question to Lord Ram in Valmiki and Kamban *Ramayana*. Tulsidas did not deal with the issue.

(iv) Valmiki included a chapter on Rama's sons born from Sita, Lav and Kush. Tulsi Das did not include Lav Kush Kand in his epic and concluded the *Ramcharitmanas* after Ram returned to Ayodhya after killing Ravan.

Q. 2. How do you differentiate high culture from popular culture in India? Give two examples from each one of them.

Ans. The term "high culture" was introduced in English by the Victorian poet-critic, Matthew Arnold through his work *Culture and Anarchy* (1869). For him, high culture was a force that encouraged moral and political good. He said that this meant to "Know the best that has been said and thought in the world" and he defined high culture as the study of perfection. The

poet T. S. Eliot, in his notes towards the definition of Culture (1948) felt that both high culture and popular culture were essential for there to be a complete culture. Much of high culture pertains to the appreciation of high art, a term that includes Literature, Performing Arts, Music and the Visual Arts. What was regarded as being a part of this 'high culture' was that which had mostly been created during a time when the artist had the patronage of wealthy, sophisticated and aesthetically inclined people and was thus able to produce works of art in an atmosphere that was free of financial or other tensions. For examples, people who go to an opera for status as opposed to actual enjoyment and Classical music.

In the 15th century, the word 'popular' when used in law and politics, denoted 'low', 'base', 'vulgar' and 'of the common people'. It was not until the latter part of the 18th century that the word gained the positive connotation of what it is taken to mean today 'widespread' and 'well-liked'. This type of culture, also known as pop culture, as the term suggests, is related to all those activities (along with their associated symbols) that are popular or common. Popular culture is also often defined as mass culture, which is commercially driven, mass-produced and is meant for mass consumption. It can also be termed as the authentic culture because it most reflects the tastes and fashions of the majority of that period. It is often seen as being almost antithetical to the exclusive, elitist 'high culture' and a sign of resistance by the masses. Popular culture has been seen to have emerged from the shift to urbanization after the Industrial Revolution. Popular culture embraces a range of fields from mass media and entertainment to cooking, literature, clothing, sports, fashion and music and is expressed through circulation in large numbers. Going to cinemas and listening to Bollywood music can be examples of popular cultures.

Q. 3. Do you think that the comparison with music is an apt one?

Ans. The comparison with music is appropriate because music plays an important role in the religious, social and artistic lives of human beings. It is an integral part of man's life. Music is as old in the history of civilisation as human speech. It existed even before human existence. It is a spontaneous outcome of the basic human emotions in a melodious manner. All that which mere words fail to convey, music successfully and convincingly conveys. Music in its definition is a phenomenon which is as vast as the Universe. Nature