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# SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: CULTURAL DIVERSITY

**B.E.G.C.-132**

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*Based on*

C.B.C.S. (Choice Based Credit System) Syllabus of

**I.G.N.O.U.**

**& Various Central, State & Other Open Universities**

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**Sample Preview  
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# QUESTION PAPER

June – 2024

(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. Explain with reference to the context of the following:**

(a) If Hindi belongs to masters,  
Then in what language shall we fight for  
freedom?  
The demand for Hindi  
Is now a demand  
for better treatment–

**Ans. Context:** These lines are taken from 'Hindi' by Raghuvir Sahay.

**Explanation: Ref.:** See Chapter-6, Page No. 59, 'Interpretation'.

(b) I approached a stem  
Swining on a reed  
And asked him  
To give me a quill.

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

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

(c) Once you are used to it  
you never afterwards  
feel anything;  
your blood never more  
congeals  
nor flows  
for wet mud has been slapped all  
over your bones.

**Ans. Reference :** These lines are taken from the poem *Habit* written by F.M. Shinde.

**Context :** It suggests that if you are used to something, you do not feel anything after that. By saying this, the poet refers to the Dalits who are used to social injustice. They have stopped feeling angry and humiliated after the prolonged humiliation.

It means the blood in the body solidifies and stops flowing. The poet refers to the blood of the Dalits has

stopped flowing, making them unable to feel hurt, anger and pain.

(d) I cannot touch  
the shadow of your wing.  
I will be born  
again and again  
As a devil,  
a ghost,  
as Kali  
and Isaki  
As the vengeful furies  
I will terrorize you and follow you.

**Ans. Reference :** These lines have been taken from the 'Untitled Poem' written by N.T. Rajkumar.

**Context :** The poet says that he will not give up his fight and seek revenge against exploitation in other forms even after his death.

This poem is not subdued in tone but loud and direct. It asserted the vengeful soul for all the pain and suffering it has gone through. The voice becomes representative of not only an individual but the condition of all Dalits. It represents a collective experience. It is the suffering and pain of many generations. The suffering and pain has given way to anger and frustration, making it a voice of rebellion and revolution. The poet calls it a 'Poisonous Poetry' to take revenge for the exploitations that the Dalits have suffered for ages.

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

**Ans. Context:** These lines are taken from 'The Colours of Truth' by Kynpham Singh Nongkynih.

**Explanation: Ref.:** See Chapter-12, Page No. 113, Q. No. 5.

# QUESTION PAPER

December – 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. Explain with reference to the context of the following:**

(a) **I am neither fire nor air  
I know not who I am  
Neither I know the secrets of religion  
Nor am I born of Adam and Eve  
I have given myself no name  
I know not who I am**

**Ans. Reference :** These lines in the extract below are taken from 'Kafi 7' by Bulley Shah.

**Context :** 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 am the boat you are the sea, and also the boatman.**

**Though you never make the shore, though yoy Let me sink, why should I be follish and afraid?**

**Ans. Reference :** These lines are taken from poem 'Baul Gaan' by Rabindranath Tagore.

**Context :** It is a complete surrender at the feet of the creator. The speaker is devoted to the God and he does not care whether the God saves him or kills him.

To convey his devotion toward the creator the poet has used metaphors like boat, sea and boatman.

The opening line "I am the boat, you are the sea, and also the boatman" affirms the power of the sea and of the boatman, the almighty, to steer the boat across the seas. The sea also symbolizes the life journey. The boat has no power of its own to move. It is propelled by the boatman who rows it through the waters and takes to the shores. The song conveys the message that the boatman (God) only steers us through life as we neither have the power nor the skill to sail through life without his grace. Again the speaker says we need not be foolish or afraid as we are steered through by the boatman. "Though you never make the shore, though you let me sink, why should I be foolish and afraid?" is a rhetorical question.

(c) **I love the Handsome one  
he has no death  
decay nor form  
no place or side  
no end nor birthmarks  
I love him O mother. Listen.**

**Ans. Reference :** These lines are taken from 'Vacana' written by Akka Mahadevi.

**Context :** 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.

(d) **He sends no news, nor shows his face,  
On the day of love, for truth, Khusrau.  
The loved one tricked me and went away  
If I could find him, I will keep  
Him in my heart with love always.**

# Sample Preview of The Chapter

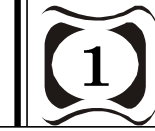
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# SELECTIONS FROM INDIAN WRITING: CULTURAL DIVERSITY



## ‘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.



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- 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-vaivrate* 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.

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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