

B.A. DEGREE EXAMINATION, NOVEMBER 2018
BRANCH XII – ENGLISH
FIRST SEMESTER

COURSE: MAJOR – CORE
PAPER: PROSE

TIME: 3 HOURS
MAX. MARKS: 100

SECTION A

I. Answer any three of the following in about 200 words each : (3 × 15 = 45)

1. “Apart from his perfectly pitched prose that conjures up vivid images, Iyer has the travel writer’s infallible eye for the quirk that lays bare the soul of people.” Give reasons for or against this statement with reference to the prescribed chapters.
2. Coming from a dysfunctional family, how does Maya Angelou depict her attempts to grapple with reality in, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*.
3. What are the characteristic features that exemplify the genre of Travel Literature?
4. Discuss the use of humour in George Mikes’ “Tea.”
5. Comment on the use of pathos in Charles Dickens’ “Letter to his Wife.”

SECTION B

II. Answer any two of the following in about 500 words each: (2 × 20 = 40)

1. Analyse some of the literary devices and strategies that Lincoln has made use of in his “Gettysburg Address.”
2. What nuances of the Mahatma are captured by Rajmohan Gandhi in his biography, *The Good Boatman*?
3. Evaluate Tamsin Jones’s writing with reference to the features of life-writing.

SECTION C

III. Analyse the following passage with reference to context, style, tone and content: (1 × 15 = 15)

On Independence Day this year I was driving from Bangalore to the small temple town of Melkote. At traffic lights within the city we were hailed by vendors selling the National Flag. When we got to the highway, we passed boys on motor bikes waving the tirangajhanda. Clearly, the Supreme Court order allowing private citizens to display the flag has had a cathartic effect. Bikes, cars, tourist buses—that day all had jhandas, big and small, made from eco-friendly cloth or out of polluting plastic.

These displays of middle-class patriotism were interesting, but more interesting still was what we found when we left the main road to Mysore. After the town of Mandya we turned right. For the next hour-and-a-half we drove through a well-watered countryside. At one crossing we came young men on cycles, handkerchiefs in mouth as they raced along the road. Following them was an ambulance. This was not the Tour de France, yet, judging by the looks on the competitors' faces and at the assembled crowd, it was a race looked forward to as eagerly, and competed for with a comparable intensity.

For the rural folk of Karnataka, as for its townspeople, the 15th of August is a day for celebration and commemoration, an occasion to enjoy as much as to remember. Shortly before we reached Melkote we passed a bullock-cart with a group of little boys in it. This was not in itself an uncommon sight, until one looked at how the boys were dressed. One wore a suit and clasped a book; a second wore a loin-cloth but was bare-bodied, chest upwards; a third wore a tightly buttoned-up tunic and had a turban on his head. Fortunately, one of my companions was a scholar who had grown up in the area, and was thus able to decode what the apparel represented. As we passed the cart he observed: 'Ambedkar, Gandhi, Visvesvarayya: when I was in school we would have had the other two, but not Ambedkar'.

I do not own a camera, and in fact do not know how to use one. Normally this does not matter, since a historian deals for the most part with people who are dead. And in any case for this column I can draw upon the The Hindu's magnificent photo library. But that day I wished I had a camera with me. Even if I couldn't use it one of my fellow travellers would have known how to. I cannot therefore bring you a picture of those boys in the bullock-cart. But I can try still to suggest what the picture I saw said.

When we passed the cart it was close to eleven o'clock in the morning. The boys were very likely returning from a school function, where they had taken part in a play or fancy dress parade, this after having sung Jana GanaMana and hoisted the National Flag. That one boy was dressed up as Gandhi was scarcely a surprise. For the Mahatma did more than anyone else to help bring about our political freedom. He united Indians of different castes and religions, and inspired them in three major movements against colonial rule. On this anniversary of the end of the British Raj, one had thus first to remember the 'Father of the Nation' which has come to replace it.

OR

Delivering a commencement address is a great responsibility; or so I thought until I cast my mind back to my own graduation. The commencement speaker that day was the distinguished British philosopher Baroness Mary Warnock. Reflecting on her speech has helped me enormously in writing this one, because it turns out that I can't remember a single word she said. This liberating discovery enables me to proceed without any fear that I might inadvertently influence you to abandon promising careers in business, the law or politics for the giddy delights of becoming a gay wizard.

You see? If all you remember in years to come is the 'gay wizard' joke, I've come out ahead of Baroness Mary Warnock. Achievable goals: the first step to self improvement.

Actually, I have wracked my mind and heart for what I ought to say to you today. I have asked myself what I wish I had known at my own graduation, and what important lessons I have learned in the 21 years that have expired between that day and this.

I have come up with two answers. On this wonderful day when we are gathered together to celebrate your academic success, I have decided to talk to you about the benefits of failure. And as you stand on the threshold of what is sometimes called 'real life', I want to extol the crucial importance of imagination.

These may seem quixotic or paradoxical choices, but please bear with me.

Looking back at the 21-year-old that I was at graduation, is a slightly uncomfortable experience for the 42-year-old that she has become. Half my lifetime ago, I was striking an uneasy balance between the ambition I had for myself, and what those closest to me expected of me.

I was convinced that the only thing I wanted to do, ever, was to write novels. However, my parents, both of whom came from impoverished backgrounds and neither of whom had been to college, took the view that my overactive imagination was an amusing personal quirk that would never pay a mortgage, or secure a pension. I know that the irony strikes with the force of a cartoon anvil, now.

So they hoped that I would take a vocational degree; I wanted to study English Literature. A compromise was reached that in retrospect satisfied nobody, and I went up to study Modern Languages. Hardly had my parents' car rounded the corner at the end of the road than I ditched German and scuttled off down the Classics corridor.

I cannot remember telling my parents that I was studying Classics; they might well have found out for the first time on graduation day. Of all the subjects on this planet, I think they would have been hard put to name one less useful than Greek mythology when it came to securing the keys to an executive bathroom.

I would like to make it clear, in parenthesis, that I do not blame my parents for their point of view. There is an expiry date on blaming your parents for steering you in the wrong direction; the moment you are old enough to take the wheel, responsibility lies with you. What is more, I cannot criticise my parents for hoping that I would never experience poverty. They had been poor themselves, and I have since been poor, and I quite agree with them that it is not an ennobling experience. Poverty entails fear, and stress, and sometimes depression; it means a thousand petty humiliations and hardships. Climbing out of poverty by your own efforts, that is indeed something on which to pride yourself, but poverty itself is romanticised only by fools.
