

ENTRANCE EXAMINATION, 2017

M.A. HISTORY

[Field of Study Codes—Ancient : ANCM (219)/
Medieval : MEDM (218)/Modern : MODM (217)]

Time Allowed : 3 hours

Maximum Marks : 100

Note : Questions from all Sections must be attempted. Section—I is compulsory (carries 30 marks). Answer any **one** question from Section—II (carries 20 marks) and any **two** questions from Section—III (each question carries 25 marks).

Candidates must indicate their preferred choice of admission, e.g., Ancient, Medieval or Modern India on their answer-book's cover-sheet in bold letters.

SECTION—I

1. Read the passage given below carefully and answer the questions that follow in your own words in not more than 100 words each (Copying from the text will be penalized) :

PASSAGE

What made possible the self-invention of a national community was the fact of alien conquest and colonial subjection. It was the British interest in determining geographical boundaries that by an Act of Parliament in 1899 converted 'India' from the name of a cultural region into a precise territory. But to the British, that was all it was. Lord Curzon, for instance, scorned the suggestion that India had 'natural frontiers'—to him, there was no Indian nationality to coincide with nature. The arbitrary precisions of colonial administrative techniques thus brought forth an historical novelty, a unified and bounded space named India.

Yet it is too simple to see India as pure invention, a complicitous by-product of the opportunities presented by the British Raj and the interests of an aspiring nationalist elite. It is less radically novel. The dissimilar agrarian regions of pre-colonial India did share intelligible, common cultural forms, derived from both Brahmanic and non-Brahmanic sources. The storehouse of shared narrative structures embodied in epics, myths and folk stories, and the family resemblance in styles of art, architecture and religious motifs—if not ritual practices—testify to a civilizational bond, that in fact extended well beyond the territorial borders of contemporary India : to Persia in the west and Indonesia in the east. Across the subcontinent, the single trait that overwhelmingly struck all outsiders was the orders of caste, which imposed themselves on incomers (except the British) and absorbed them into the productive relations of the society. Though hardly suggestive of a political unity, these characteristics—mythic

narratives, aesthetic and ritual motifs, the typology of caste—did bestow a certain unified coherence on lives in the subcontinent.

Equally significant was India's archive of images of political community, which related culture to polity. In the Brahmanic traditions, for instance, the Puranic literature expresses a sense of the subcontinent's natural geographical frontiers, reflected in a sacred geography mapped out by *tirthas*, pilgrimage points scattered across the land, and encompassed by the idea of mythic realms like *Aryavarta* or *Bharatavarsha*. In later periods, during the central Asian invasions from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, epics like the *Ramayana* were infused with political significance and were used by regional kings and courts to represent the political community. These narratives became a key by which one could read contemporary events. And of the period preceding the rule of the British, some historians have begun to speak of an 'old patriotism of the homelands' in certain regions—the strongest version being the Maratha kingdoms of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with their acute sense of territoriality, veneration for the land, and a vision of community that transcended bounds of caste and drew upon non-Brahmanic traditions such as Bhakti devotional cults. The comparatively brief episodes of subcontinental empire suggested a still different conception of political community—based not on a common culture but encompassing different religious groups, which imperial patterns of power allowed to live in insulated adjacency, requiring simply that they acknowledge the paramountcy of political authority and punctually yield revenue; religious and social habits were left unmolested.

This varied, amorphous historical inheritance was at once a spur and caution to the imagining of a national Indian past. It carried no single message. The nationalist elite itself had no single, clear definition of this idea, and one of the remarkable facts about the nationalist movement that brought India to independence was its capacity to entertain diverse, often contending visions of India.

The arrival of the modern State on the Indian landscape over the past century and a half, and its growth and consolidation as a stable entity after 1947, are decisive historical facts. They mark a shift from a society where authority was secured by diverse local methods to one where it is located in a single, sovereign agency. The period of Indian history since 1947 might be seen as the adventure of a political idea : democracy.

After 1947 the idea of India sought to coordinate within the form of a modern State a variety of values : democracy, religious tolerance, economic development and cultural pluralism. The unexpected historical trajectories of these various components since 1947 have changed the conditions of political competition in India, as well as the identity of the competitors, and as a result, it has become much more difficult to sustain a vision of a single political community.

And yet the idea of India retains a remarkable tenacity. Like their nationalist predecessors, Indians of vastly different backgrounds and ambitions today all wish to claim it for themselves and testify to the presence of a common history, a shared Indian past. And, in its ability constantly to encompass diverse ideas of what India is, this history is itself expressive of the Indian idea.

Indianness outlined after 1947 was constituted out of internal diversity, trying to hold together divergent considerations and interests. The result was a highly unusual nationalism that resists summary in clear or simple statements. It tried to accommodate within the form of a new nation state significant internal diversities. It was a contingent acquisition, based on a coherent if disputable picture of India. It did not reassure itself by relying on a settled image of the culture, nor did it try to impose one. That was its most important trait : it did not simplify the definition of Indianness.

India has been since 1947 continuously subject to a common political authority. The idea of India has been constituted through struggles to balance contrary pulls in a coherent political project, to respect the diversities of culture with a commitment to a common enterprise of development. Acceptance of this inherited, proliferating diversity and the capacity to live with it are for Indians pragmatic necessities.

Questions :

- (a) What are the resources that have forged an Indian 'civilizational bond'?
- (b) What were the ways in which a 'sacred geography' was created in the subcontinent?
- (c) How was a premodern political community formed?
- (d) What was the colonial or nationalist idea of India?
- (e) What was the political project of the new modern Indian State after 1947?
- (f) Do you think the idea of India is an invention?

SECTION—II

Answer *any one* question

- 2. Has environmental history transformed our understanding of the past?
- 3. In what ways do diversity and dissent shape our understanding of the past and the present?
- 4. Identify and discuss what you consider to be two recent shifts in history writing.
- 5. Has globalization increased economic differences while decreasing social and cultural diversity?
- 6. In what ways do you think caste influences politics in contemporary India?
- 7. Does literature represent historical reality? Discuss with examples from premodern or modern texts.

SECTION—III

Answer *any two* questions

8. Define and explain the decline of the Indus Civilization.
9. Discuss the main features of the second urbanization in the Indian subcontinent.
10. Explain the differences between *varna* and *jati*.
11. How do you explain the frequent dynastic changes during the Delhi Sultanate and dynastic stability under the Mughals?
12. Discuss the various factors that contributed to the growth of the economy in seventeenth century India.
13. Analyze the nature of the Vijayanagara state. In what ways did the Vijayanagara court culture consolidate and legitimize the Vijayanagara state?
14. To what extent did the First World War and its aftermath shape Indian politics?
15. Print culture brought about a major transformation in colonial India. Discuss.
16. Did the colonial state influence Indian identities?
17. Why did the revolution in Russia occur in 1917 and not earlier?
18. Why did the French Revolution end in authoritarianism?
19. Bring out the distinctive features of nationalism in nineteenth century Europe.

★ ★ ★