

J B COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ENGLISH HONOURS SELECTION TEST (EHSET), 2018

Time: 2 hours

Full Marks: 60

1. Read the following passage carefully and then *answer, as far as possible in your own words*, the questions that follow:

Since childhood he has had the habit and the ability to read while walking, holding a book in one hand on his way to school, from room to room in his parents' three-story house in Alipore, and up and down the red clay stairs. Nothing roused him. Nothing distracted him. Nothing caused him to stumble. As a teenager he had gone through all of Dickens. He read newer authors as well, Graham Greene and Somerset Maugham, all purchased from his favorite stall on College Street with *pujo* money. But most of all he loved the Russians. His paternal grandfather, a former professor of European literature at Calcutta University, had read from them aloud in English translations when Ashoke was a boy. Each day at tea time, as his brothers and sisters played *kabadi* and cricket outside, Ashoke would go to his grandfather's room, and for an hour his grandfather would read supine on the bed, his ankles crossed and the book propped open on his chest, Ashoke curled at his side. For that hour Ashoke was deaf and blind to the world around him. He did not hear his brothers and sisters laughing on the rooftop, or see the tiny, dusty, cluttered room in which his grandfather read. "Read all the Russians, and then reread them," his grandfather had said. "They will never fail you." When Ashoke's English was good enough, he began to read the books himself. It was while walking on some of the world's noisiest, busiest streets, on Chowringhee and Gariahat Road, that he had read pages of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and *Anna Karenina*, and *Fathers and Sons*. Once, a younger cousin who had tried to imitate him had fallen down the red clay

staircase in Ashoke's house and broken an arm. Ashoke's mother was always convinced that her eldest son would be hit by a bus or a tram, his nose deep into *War and Peace*. That he would be reading a book the moment he died.

One day, in the earliest hours of October 20, 1961, this nearly happened. Ashoke was twenty-two, a student at B.E. College. He was traveling on the 83 Up Howrah-Ranchi Express to visit his grandparents for the holidays; they had moved from Calcutta to Jamshedpur upon his grandfather's retirement from the university. Ashoke had never spent the holidays away from his family. But his grandfather had recently gone blind, and he had requested Ashoke's company specifically, to read him *The Statesman* in the morning, *Dostoyevsky* and *Tolstoy* in the afternoon. Ashoke accepted the invitation eagerly. He carried two suitcases, the first one containing clothes and gifts, the second empty. For it would be on this visit, his grandfather had said, that the books in his glass-fronted case, collected over a lifetime and preserved under lock and key, would be given to Ashoke. The books had been promised to Ashoke throughout his childhood, and for as long as he could remember he had coveted them more than anything else in the world. He had already received a few in recent years, given to him on birthdays and other special occasions. But now that the day had come to inherit the rest, a day his grandfather could no longer read the books himself, Ashoke was saddened, and as he placed the empty suitcase under his seat, he was disconcerted by its weightlessness, regretful of the circumstances that would cause it, upon his return, to be full. (From *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri)

- a) Where did the parents of the main character in this narrative have their house? 1
- b) Where did Ashoke's grandparents shift to and when? 2
- c) What single word would you use to describe Ashoke as a child? 1

- d) Do you think Ashoke was a normal child? Give reasons for your answer. 2
- e) Describe some of the peculiarities of Ashoke's character. 3
- f) Where did Ashoke get money to buy books with? 1
- g) Who do you think was the major influence in the formation of Ashoke's character? 1
- h) Name some of the authors whose works Ashoke read. 3
- i) Why did Ashoke's grandfather ask for his company in October, 1961? 1
- j) Explain why Ashok sad was and 'regretful' during his train journey to meet his grandfather. 5

2. Read the poem given below and answer the questions that follow:

A Song: "Men of England" — Percy Bysshe Shelley

Men of England, wherefore plough
 For the lords who lay ye low?
 Wherefore weave with toil and care
 The rich robes your tyrants wear?

Wherefore feed and clothe and save
 From the cradle to the grave
 Those ungrateful drones who would
 Drain your sweat—nay, drink your blood?

Wherefore, Bees of England, forge
 Many a weapon, chain, and scourge,
 That these stingless drones may spoil
 The forced produce of your toil?

Have ye leisure, comfort, calm,
 Shelter, food, love's gentle balm?
 Or what is it ye buy so dear
 With your pain and with your fear?

The seed ye sow, another reaps;
 The wealth ye find, another keeps;
 The robes ye weave, another wears;
 The arms ye forge, another bears.

Sow seed—but let no tyrant reap:
 Find wealth—let no imposter heap:
 Weave robes—let not the idle wear:
 Forge arms—in your defence to bear.

Shrink to your cellars, holes, and cells—
 In hall ye deck another dwells.
 Why shake the chains ye wrought? Ye see
 The steel ye tempered glance on ye.

With plough and spade and hoe and loom
 Trace your grave and build your tomb
 And weave your winding-sheet—till fair
 England be your Sepulchre.

- a) Which section of society do you think the poem addresses? Give reasons for your answer. 2
- b) Who are referred to as 'tyrants' in this poem and why? 3
- c) Identify some traditional English trades hinted at in the poem. 2
- d) What is the central metaphor connecting the second and third stanzas? 2
- e) What do you think the tone of this poem is—laudatory, inflammatory or cautionary? 1
- f) Attempt a critical appreciation of the poem, highlighting aspects like language, images used, use of simile/ metaphor, rhyme, etc. 8

3. Write an essay in about 400 words, on *any one* of the following topics: 20

- a) Death of the Book in the digital age of mass production.
- b) Your views on the Citizenship Amendment Bill/ NRC updating.
- c) Mahatma Gandhi's much quoted exhortation, "*Be the change that you want to see in others...*"
- d) Your vision of an ideal world order.
- e) The relationship between life and learning; profession and vocation.

f) Study the picture given below and write an essay in about 400 words, based on the situation depicted therein: 20


