

Indian Institute of Technology, Humanities and Social Sciences Department

Selection Procedure for PhD Admissions, December 2014

Total Marks: 100; Duration: 2 hours

SECTION A: TEST ON GENERAL COMPREHENSION: 30 MARKS ONLY

In this section, you are required to read a passage and answer a few questions based on it. Answer any ONE of the TWO questions (Question 1 or Question 2) given below: 30 Marks only

Question 1.

Passage:

“Philosophic contemplation, when it is unalloyed, does not aim at proving that the rest of the universe is akin to man. All acquisition of knowledge is an enlargement of the Self, but this enlargement is best attained when it is not directly sought. It is obtained when the desire for knowledge is alone operative, by a study which does not wish in advance that its objects should have this or that character, but adapts the Self to the characters which it finds in its objects. This enlargement of Self is not obtained when, taking the Self as it is, we try to show that the world is so similar to this Self that knowledge of it is possible without any admission of what seems alien. The desire to prove this is a form of self-assertion and, like all self-assertion, it is an obstacle to the growth of Self which it desires, and of which the Self knows that it is capable. Self-assertion, in philosophic speculation as elsewhere, views the world as a means to its own ends; thus it makes the world of less account than Self, and the Self sets bounds to the greatness of its goods. In contemplation, on the contrary, we start from the not-Self, and through its greatness the boundaries of Self are enlarged; through the infinity of the universe the mind which contemplates it achieves some share in infinity.” (Bertrand Russell)

Please answer the following:

1a. What kind of “pursuit of knowledge” is said by Russell to contribute to the “enlargement of Self” in the above passage? (Approximately 50 words)

1b. How does Russell contrast “Knowledge of Self-assertion” with “Knowledge as Contemplation” in the above passage? (Approximately 50 words)

Question 2.

Passage:

One of the underrated pleasures of living in a city is anonymity —guaranteed not by the fact that you look the same as everyone else but that no one really cares that you look different. And a truly cosmopolitan city is one in which everyone looks different. I have been fortunate that for the 30 or so years that I have lived in Bangalore I have not had to deal with the fact that I look different. Save for occasional reminders of my Chineseness, the city has given me enough space to be who I am — cinophile, bibliophile, foodie — without having to bother too much about questions of identity. It is therefore

disconcerting to suddenly step out into public spaces self-conscious of my Mongoloid features. Paranoia is not a grand sensation and it manifests itself in the myriad minute gestures and encounters. It seems unbelievable that the experience of a city can change so rapidly because it is clear to me that the last few days in Bangalore have been precisely about that. A miasma of fear, doubt and anxiety has descended on the city. It is possible that much of this has been fuelled by rumours and hearsay; and while the rumours may be false the fear sadly isn't.

The large drove of people from the northeast fleeing the city in overloaded trains does not bode well in a country haunted by trains carrying tales of violence from its place of origin.

It was from around August 14 that one started hearing of threats being made against members of the northeast community followed by accounts of isolated attacks. Most of these circulated by way of SMSs, e-mails and through Facebook. Is there a grand conspiracy behind this ecology of fear as some suggest? It is perhaps too early to say and one would do well not to hazard any guesses. But the fact that a mere rumour could result in an exodus of a large number of people points to a more disturbing trend. Most of the people leaving are migrant workers employed in the hospitality industry, beauty parlours and private security. That a relatively large number of people have not felt safe and secure in a city that they have lived in for many years is symptomatic of a larger problem of integration. While there has been a lot of lip service in the last few days to Bangalore being a hospitable city, perhaps it is time to acknowledge that we may have bestowed the tag on ourselves in a moment of self-conceit. Perhaps it is a much more tenuous compact based on benefits gained from migrant labour without the grant of full cultural citizenship. And perhaps it is time to ask if years of having to deal with quotidian humiliations, passive aggression directed at cultural practices (dress, food, sexuality) is what is responsible for Bangalore's failure to instill a sense of belonging among migrants.

At any rate, this is a much longer term problem that all cities in India will have to address since a host-guest relation is measured not just from the perspective of the host but also by how much the guest feels at home. I am not even certain that a city claiming cosmopolitan status should use the host-guest metaphor. Arjun Appadurai says one of the markers of globalisation is that a very small percentage of people will die in the place they were born in. Cosmopolitanism therefore describes our urban reality as one in which, at some level, everyone is a stranger, yet we all possess the right not to be treated as strangers. Indians living abroad know this only too well; perhaps it is what Amitav Ghosh meant when, writing about his love for Egypt, he said that it gave him a right to be there and a sense of entitlement.

The more pressing issue at hand, however, is the question of what unfolds in the days to come. Over the past few days there have been impressive efforts at building trust and confidence. Representatives of the Muslim community, the northeast groups and civil society organisations have come together to assuage the fears of people.

While there may be stray incidents of aggression or intimidation, fears of planned targeting of a community do not seem to be empirically grounded. And yet we are on a precipice and things could spiral beyond control. The people returning to the northeast may have left out of fear but once they reach home the fear could easily turn into anger. There is the danger that this rage may be directed against minority or migrant

communities in their own States, and of that violence then turning the fiction of violence in Bangalore and other cities into a reality.

The need of the hour is to contain this spillover effect. Politicians of all shades and the media have to recognise the vital role that they play in diffusing the situation rather than inflaming it. Rumours and riots have always been insidiously linked to each other and we have no choice but to deal with the situation before us with utmost care and responsibility. Centuries of immigrant struggles have won us the right to say that a city can belong to us even if we do not belong to the city. And if we do not care of what belongs to us, we will run the danger of losing it.

(This is an article written by Lawrence Liang that appeared in the *Hindu* on August 18, 2012).

Please answer the following (Approximately 50 words for each answer).

2a How did the events of August 2012 change Liang's perception of Bangalore? Please take the entire piece into account before writing.

2b The writer suspects that the host-guest metaphor may not be suitable for a city claiming cosmopolitan status. What might he mean by this? Can you explain in your own words?

2c What sort of danger seems most pressing and terrible to the writer?