

PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

U.G. ADMISSION TEST, 2013

Answer all questions.

Answer Q1 only in English. Other questions may be answered either in English or in Bengali.

Q3 has two options. Answer any ONE option.

Do not put any identification mark on your answer sheets.

1. "The safety of the people should be the supreme law." (25 marks)

(Cicero, *On Laws*)

Discuss the above statement by the ancient Roman thinker Cicero. Is a state which is governed by rule of law the best way to ensure the safety and welfare of citizens? What do you think should happen when a section of the population feels that the existing laws need to be overthrown for the welfare of the people? Or, from another perspective, is a state justified in taking whatever measure it feels is necessary to ensure the good of the people, even to the point of suspending normal laws?

2. "At Sarnath, near Benares, I would almost see the Buddha preaching his first sermon, and some of his recorded words would come like a distant echo to me through two thousand five hundred years. Ashoka's pillars of stone with their inscriptions would speak to me in their magnificent language and tell me of a man who, though an emperor, was greater than any king or emperor. At Fatehpur-Sikri, Akbar, forgetful of his empire, was seated holding converse and debate with the learned of all the faiths, curious to learn something new and seeking an answer to the eternal problem of man. Thus slowly the long panorama of India's history unfolded itself before me, with its ups and downs, its triumphs and defeats."

(Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*)

- (a) Discuss the precolonial Indian models of 'rational' argumentation and governance which are being invoked here by Jawaharlal Nehru in his portrayal of Indian history. (8 marks)
- (b) How did modern Indians engage with the past to fashion a kind of hybrid modernity which would draw both on Indian traditions and on 'Western' modernity? (9 marks)
- (c) Is history primarily a study of the past, or can it also be deployed to create new visions of ethical and social critique? (8 marks)

3. Below, you see a painting by Abanindranath Tagore of Bharat Mata (the personified image of 'Mother' India). Taking a cue from the image, discuss why India is often represented as a woman, and indeed as a goddess. What messages about Indian nationalism are conveyed through such images?



OR

Write an imaginary dialogue between Lord Curzon and Mahatma Gandhi on how India should achieve social progress. (25 marks)

4. (a) Discuss the three terms 'liberty', 'equality', and 'fraternity' in relation to each other. Do the concepts conveyed by these terms support each other, or do they also often contradict each other? (15 marks)

(b) Discuss the relationship between the concept of 'history' as an academic discipline and the concept of 'literature'. What are the similarities and differences between them in terms of conveying commentaries on society? Does 'history' necessarily offer a more faithful portrayal of social reality, or can 'literature' offer glimpses into human social truths that are neglected by historians? Is there a clear difference between 'literature' and 'history', or are the borders between them not so rigid? (10 marks)