**Text:**

One of the enduring images of Calcutta is the presence of an adda. Roughly translated as the place, it is a spot where people gather, often at a street corner, usually at a set time, to discuss and debate. The topic may be anything: French New Wave cinema; the differences between Stalinists and Trotskyites; or even whether 'the prince of Bengal', Sourav Ganguly, has outlived his utility as a member of India's cricket team. Opinions are expressed freely, and discussions go on for hours, with neither side (assuming there are only two sides) willing to give in easily.

While addas are special to Calcutta, they are found in other parts of India as well, and form an essential part of the Indian tradition, of conversation, deliberation and debate, where the give and take of opinions is routine and loud arguments are frequent. The willingness to listen to other points of view, accepting some, modifying others, rejecting a few, is at the heart of India's democratic experience, according to the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen. In his new book, The Argumentative Indian: Writings on Indian History, Culture and Identity, which brings together his essays on Indian society published over the last decade, Mr. Sen reinforces the idea Of Indians being loquacious, whose liberal traditions are derived less from their appreciation of democratic ideals learnt from the West, and more from their own tradition of svikriti, or acceptance.

This exchange is not restricted to the elite. He writes:

It would be a great mistake in this context to assume that because of the possible effectiveness of well-tutored and disciplined arguments, the argumentative tradition must, in general, favour the privileged and the well-educated, rather than the dispossessed and the deprived. Some of the most powerful arguments in Indian intellectual history have, in fact, been made about the lives of the least privileged groups, which have been drawn on the substantive force of these claims, rather than on the cultivated brilliance of well-trained dialectics.

The examples he cites are not only from India, but also drawn from contemporary history, including election results like those of 1977, when Indira Gandhi's Congress party was routed after a spell of emergency in which democracy was briefly suspended; and of 2004, when poor Indians voted out a coalition which had presided over a period of prosperity which had in some areas widened inequality.

However, as the economist Joan Robinson, who taught Mr. Sen at Cambridge, told him once whenever you make any generalization about India, the opposite is equally true. Put another way, the late Nirad Chaudhuri wrote once that in India even exceptions run into, millions. Some may challenge Mr. Sen's hypothesis of the argumentative nature of Indians by pointing out the submissive nature of Indians before those with power or authority, a point the Indian diplomat PavanVarma makes in his recent book Being Indian. And many could question the notion that Indians settle their differences peacefully by pointing out the sorry history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent.

But Mr. Sen, renowned as an economist and widely praised for bringing a moral, philosophical perspective to the dismal science, is on to something when he says that such violence is the aberration, not the rule. And he does this in a gentle tone, and spares no one in his critique. He challenges Hindu nationalists who have portrayed Hinduism as a monotheistic, intolerant religion, out to seek revenge against Muslims today because of the plunder and pillage of some Muslim invaders centuries ago, by showing other Muslim kings who were integrationist and respectful of Indian culture. But he also upbraids-again gently-the left-leaning secularists of India, who challenge the Hindu nationalists by emphasizing the contributions of other religions and cultures, and by belittling Hinduism for its hierarchical nature.

Mr. Sen is critical of such an approach. You cannot deny that vast majority of Indians are Hindus, and their practices and thinking have influenced India, shaping it positively, making it a special place, in which the narrow nationalism of the Hindu fundamentalists is the exception. The posturing of some Indian academics and the broader left come in for special criticism: they draw on arguments developed in Western universities and criticize globlization and its influence on India, as if India is a fragile state that would get swamped by the tide. Some Indian politicians regularly fulminate against the influence of MTV, and their followers have ransacked shops selling St. Valentine's Day cards in India. But India has always had an open mind, its feet planted firmly in the ground, and it has absorbed external influences remarkably well, Mr. Sen points out.

What Indians learn from the West is not so much outward manifestation as the underlying ideas. And so it is that a poet like Rabindranath Tagore develops dislike for nationalism which can degenerate into fascism, and a filmmaker like Satyajit Ray, sees vittorio de Sica's The Bicycle Thief, yet does not make an imitative film, but learns to use non-actors in outdoor locations, and makes Pather Panchali, (Song of the Little Road), which then goes on to win a special prize at Cannes in 1956. This ability-to learn from elsewhere, transform the idea, and make it your own is a major part of Indian tradition. Which is why when McDonald’s sets up shop in India, It does not sound the death knell of the samosa, and Indian chefs don't go about destroying the restaurant; rather, McDonald's is forced to offer the McAloo Tikki Burger for its vegetarian customers. India has always absorbed external influences, making them part of its syncretic being.

In highlighting this absorptive capacity of Indian culture, Mr. Sen also challenges the notion that Asian values are somehow different from Western values, and that the idea of human rights is Western, and hence a foreign concept for the Asian mindset. He would have approved of the response the former New York Congressman Stephen Solarz gave a journalist in Singapore in the late 1990s. The reporter asked him if democracy was after all a Western value, since Singapore's then Senior Minister Lee Kuan Yew and Malaysia’s then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammed had said so. Mr. Solarz replied that he could think of several Asians who would disagree with that view, and they included the Dalai Lama and Anwar Ibrahim.

At a time when China and India are emerging as this century’s major economic powers, one of the most interesting chapters in the book is devoted to the cultural connections between ancient India and China. Mr. Sen reveals the rich and deep exchange of views among scholars, shared manuscripts, trade, and more importantly, scientific and mathematical knowledge. The colonial experience brought this exchange to an end. Today, when Indian pharmaceutical companies set up shop in China, and Chinese software companies invest in Bangalore in India, they are only picking up the contact that had been suspended temporarily.

The resilience of Indian democracy, ultimately, emerges from its argumentative tradition, based on public reasoning, which also explains the defence of secular politics and the struggle against inequality. It does not mean the absence of horrendous inequities, but it does show that Indians have the means to deal with those problems peacefully.

**You are not allowed to go back to the passage!**

**MEMORY-BASED QUESTIONS**

1. According to the first two paragraphs of the passage, which of the following is not a characteristic of adda?
2. The topic of discussion in an adda is not restricted to any particular sphere of knowledge
3. People gather in addas only in Calcutta
4. The discussions or debates continue for hours
5. The spot where people gather for the discussion is usually some street corner
6. The reviewer considers economics to be \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.
7. dismal b. argumentative

c. challenging d. both a and b

1. In the light of the information given in the passage, who among the following do not find a mention in Amartya Sen’s book?
2. Muslim kings in India
3. Hindu nationalists
4. Pavan Varma and Nirad Chaudhuri
5. Indira Gandhi and her Congress party
6. Which of the following views about the Asians would be supported by Amartya Sen?
7. They harbour a negative attitude towards the concept of human rights
8. They have always challenged the concept of human rights
9. They think that the concept of human rights is a Western one, hence not to be imbibed
10. None of the above
11. Why do you think Amartya Sen has devoted one section of his book to describe the cultural connections between India and China?
12. Because India’s political relations with china have been strained recently
13. Because India and China are fast emerging as major economic powers and are entering into trade relations
14. Because Chinese and Indian histories are closely intertwined
15. Because Chinese software companies have invested heavily in the software firm in Bangalore

**COMPREHENSION-BASED QUESTIONS:**

1. From the expression ”... in India even exceptions run into millions", we can infer that India is a land characterized by:
2. Secularity b. extremity

c. heterogeneity d. rigidity

1. Which of the following views will be least supported by Amartya Sen?
2. Indians are loquacious by nature and are quite accommodating when it comes to accepting external influences
3. The Hindu nationalists should allow the dead seep in their grave and not seek revenge against the Muslims today
4. The election result of 2004 shows that Indians will not hesitate to throw away a government which has encouraged discrimination in some spheres
5. When it comes to fashion and culture of the West, Indians throw their sensibilities to the winds and blindly ape the West
6. The excerpt from Amartya Sen's book has been given to demonstrate that:
7. the argumentative tradition in India is not class-specific
8. in India it has been observed that well-tutored and disciplined arguments are always more effective
9. the whole gamut of Indian intellectual history is full of powerful arguments
10. none of the above
11. Which of the following is **NOT** true according to the passage?
12. The tradition of svikriti or acceptance is very much an Indian concept
13. Indian consumers flock to McDonald’s outlets as a sign of acceptance
14. Indians are very open to accepting foreign influence but they also have the ability to mould It according to their own perceptions
15. Some Indian politicians feel that MTV has a negative influence on Indian society
16. What is implied by the sentence "It does not mean the absence of horrendous inequities, but it does so that Indians have the means to deal with those problems peacefully”?
17. India is a land of unpleasant inequalities
18. Democratic principles are deep-rooted enough to end the existing inequalities
19. Indians have an inherent faith in peace
20. Indians have developed a stoic resistance to social inequalities

**ANALYSIS OF READING SPEED**

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| --- |
| • Count the number of words you have read till STOP. Divide the no. by 3 that gives the words/minute count. for example, if you have read 900 words till stop then 300 words /minute is your RAW READING COUNT.  • Check your answers for the memory based and comprehension based questions.  • If for example you have got 3 correct in the memory section than your score for MEMORYSECTION(MS) is 3/5\*100=60%. If you have got 2/5 In the comprehension section then your score for COMPREHENSION section (CS) is 2/5 \* 100=40%.  • Your final EFFECTIVE READING SCORE= (.5\* RRC \*MS) +(.5\*RRC\*CS). In the above scenario your score will be (.5\*300\*60%) + (.5\*300\*40%) =90+60=150.  • So your EFFECTIVE READING SPEED is 150. |

**CHART FOR ANALYSING READING SPEED**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Effective Reading Speed** | **Remarks** |
| < 150 | Below Average |
| 151 – 200 | Satisfactory |
| 201 – 250 | Fair |
| 251 – 350 | Excellent |
| > 350 | Outstanding |

**There are 7 types of questions that are usually framed in Reading Comprehension (RC):**

1. **Universal –** This question-type asks about the big picture, the passage as a whole.

“Which of the following best summarizes the passage?”

“What is the author attempting to illustrate through this passage?”

“What is the thematic highlight of this passage?”

“Which of the following best describes one of the main ideas \_\_\_\_?”

1. **Specific –** This type asks about details from the passage. The correct answer is often a paraphrase of something directly stated in the passage.

“Which \_\_\_\_\_ has not been cited as \_\_\_\_\_\_?”

“According to the author, what is \_\_\_\_\_\_?”

“By a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, the author means…”

“According to the passage, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?”

“Which factor has not been cited \_\_\_\_\_\_\_?”

1. **Vocab-in-Context –** This is a type of Specific question which asks about the use of a particular word or phrase.

“In the passage, the phrase \_\_\_\_\_ refers to”

“In the sentence, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_, what is the meaning of ‘\_\_\_’?”

1. **Function –** This type of question asks about the logical structure of a passage.

“The author cites \_\_\_\_\_\_, in order to”

“The \_\_\_\_\_ in the passage has been used by the author to”

“Which of the following best describes the reason the author \_\_\_\_?”

1. **Inference –** Inference questions require you to understand what is implied by but not necessarily stated in the passage. The correct answer may rely on subtle phrases from the passage and be hard to find/less obvious than Specific questions.

“The passage uses \_\_\_\_\_ to imply that \_\_\_”

“Which of the following cannot be inferred from the passage?”

“What does the author mean by \_\_\_\_\_?”

“What can be inferred when the author states\_\_\_\_?”

The sentence, ‘\_\_\_\_\_\_’, implies that”

1. **Application –** This is a slightly more specific type of inference question, where you’re asking to choose an answer which mimics a process or exemplifies a situation described in the passage.

Which of the following could be used to replace\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?

“A \_\_\_\_\_, as conceptualized in the passage, can best be described as\_\_\_\_”

“Which of the following best illustrates the situation \_\_\_\_”

1. **Tone –** This question type is also a specific type of inference, requiring you to infer the author’s point of view and position on certain statements.

“The author of the passage is most likely to agree with \_\_\_\_?”

“Which of the following views does the author most likely support\_\_?”