

HUL 290 TECHNOLOGY AND CULTURE MINOR I EXAMINATION

TIME: 1 HOUR **MARKS:** 15 **QUESTIONS:** There are four questions below. Answer Question 1 and any two from the remaining three. That is, you should attempt three questions in all. Each question is worth 5 marks.

Length of answers: about 2 pages. Remember that this is an open-book exam, intended to test thoughtfulness, clarity of expression and originality of mind. You will therefore be evaluated not on the 'correctness' or length of your responses but on your skills at argument and your ability to find good examples to support your case.

Q1. YOUR CULTURE: You have discussed in class the alleged attributes of a 'cultured person'. Now read the following descriptions.

- i. A female student who is too modest to interact with anyone, gets middling grades and somehow manages to convey the impression that she is a misfit in IIT.
- ii. A male student who gets awful grades but is good at communication and very popular.
- iii. A male student who gets excellent grades, but is regarded as selfish and intolerant.
- iv. A female student who is clever, helpful, knowledgeable about the arts but argues a lot.
- v. A reserved category student who is not coping too well, but is brilliant at music and sports.
- vi. A quiet, average male student, with no striking personality traits who disturbs no one.

Within the 'IIT culture' who, according to you, would be most highly regarded and who least? Why? In other words, what are some of the factors, in your view, that make for a culturally confident versus a culturally disadvantaged person in your own student environment? Are these parameters fair? Discuss.

Q2. NEHRU AND GANDHI: What are three ways in which you would be justified in calling Jawaharlal Nehru a 'technological determinist' and three ways in which you could describe Gandhi as a 'cultural relativist'? Your answer, based on the views expressed by Nehru in the extracts you have read in class and on Gandhi's perception of technology in the passage you have read from *Hind Swaraj*, can be in point form. Finally, add a paragraph on whose approach you find yourself more in sympathy with in the Indian context of today, giving as specific reasons as you can for your answer.

Q 3. THE ROLE OF ENGINEERS IN A DEMOCRACY: "This is not the age of pamphleteers. It is the age of engineers. The spark plug is mightier than the pen. Democracy will not be saved by men who talk fluently but by the engineers". Lancelot Hogben ('Science for the Citizen') Why, in your opinion, does Hogben think democracy can be 'saved' by engineers rather than by persuasive and fluent writers? Do you agree with him? Provide cogent reasons and illustrations for your answer.

Q 4. MEMES, GADGETS & MODERNITY: In Hindu mythology, the goddess Durga is usually represented as ten-armed (*dashambhuja*). In seven of her hands, she holds the following objects: i) a shell (*shankha*); ii) a wheel (*chakra*); iii) a club (*gada*); iv) a trident (*trishul*); v) a chopper (*kharga*); vi) a bow/arrow (*teer-dhanush*); vii) a lotus (*kamal*). One hand is raised in benediction. However, two of her hands are still free. From this, my questions to you are:

- a. Which, if any, of the above objects in Durga's hands would, in your opinion, qualify as a 'meme'? Briefly provide reasons for your answer.
- b. If you were to place two present-day technological inventions in Durga's hands (for example, a mixi or a computer or an atomic bomb), which two objects would you choose and how would you explain to Durga their usefulness and value? You can decide on any object that you think fit.
- c. If you want to persuade Durga to get rid of some of the objects she has been holding on to for such a long time, which two objects would you like her to discard and why?

Note: You may, if you wish, write your answer to this question in the form of a dialogue between Durga and yourself where you are attempting to 'modernize' her, but remember that you have, as well, to try and empathise with her world-view and the cultural significance of the 'old' objects she holds.