

Verbal Ability Practice – 2

Passage-1

In India, the working of democracy has effortlessly adapted to the undemocratic social structures of the past. Obviously, the two are mutually opposed; in other societies the contradiction would have asphyxiated the institution. In India the older tradition co-opted the younger institution. People flocked to polling booths but voted mostly according to caste affiliations. Numerical majorities prevailed, but candidates continued to represent segments of the established hierarchic structure. In the 1990s, the largely agrarian intermediate castes- sought to convert their steadily growing economic clout into political power. Their leaders asked for — and got — reservations in government jobs in the name of the downtrodden. But the OBCs remained inimical to those lower down the traditional social hierarchy, the Dalits and minority tribes, earlier beneficiaries of affirmative action as part of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Irrespective of their social background, the elected are acutely conscious of their status. The privileges and immunities that proclaim their superior status have grown, not lessened, in democratic India. The process unconsciously mimics the special privileges accorded to the higher castes. The democratic idea has blended too with the felt need to project power. Elected representatives show no reticence in flaunting their visible symbols of authority.

In the years just after 1947 there was a conscious attempt, probably under the short-lived influence of Gandhi, to curb the proclivities of the earlier tradition. It was a losing battle. The mentalities of the past very soon got the upper hand over the fledgling new values enshrined in the democratic experiment. In fact, over the years, as the very functioning of the democratic process enhanced the ‘legitimacy’ of those who emerged victorious, their behaviour has acquired a blatancy that openly mocks notions of democratic restraint or rectitude.

When parliamentary democracy was introduced, most Indian politicians were attracted by the rewards of the democratic process, not by the democratic idea. Under the warrant of precedence, an elected member of even a provincial legislature was ranked higher than the highest bureaucrat of the State. More importantly, at the local level, an elected representative was suddenly catapulted above the district administrative chief and the superintendent of police who, following the practice of the colonial regime, were earlier all powerful and quite unapproachable. Success in democratic politics therefore ensured rapid upward mobility, and the possibility of this sudden accretion of power sent a surge of anticipation through the stagnant waters of Indian society.

It is no surprise then that the phenomenal growth in the infrastructure of democracy — the size of the electorate, the number of polling booths, the thousands of counting machines, the length of ballot papers, the reach of the Election Commission — has happily coexisted with undemocratic trends in political behaviour. Political parties are rarely democratic internally. The word of the leader is law. Political dynasties proliferate, regardless of merit. Dissent is neither encouraged nor tolerated. Sycophancy abounds, and has conventional sanction. A leading magazine recently did a survey on which leader Indians trust the most. The not unsurprising choice was Indira Gandhi, the lady who suspended democracy to impose the Emergency in 1975. Her imperious style, and the unemotional way she dealt with her political opponents and those who fell from her favour, answered a subconscious predisposition in the Indian psyche to look up to and accept a ‘strong’ leader. The leading psychoanalyst SudhirKakar ascribes this to “an unconscious tendency to ‘submit’ to an idealised omnipotent figure, both in the inner world of fantasy and in the outside world of making a living; the lifelong search for someone, a charismatic leader or a guru, who will provide mentorship and a guiding world-view, thereby restoring intimacy and authority to individual life.”

Indira Gandhi continues to be widely respected for the dexterity and confidence with which she played the power game, and the ruthlessness with which she moved to achieve her political goals. A concern for democracy was, in any case, conspicuously absent in most educated Indians when she imposed the Emergency. There was not even a semblance of credible protest anywhere in the country when almost the entire opposition was put in jail. The bureaucracy quietly accepted the new regimen. The corporate world welcomed it. The most spectacular capitulation was among the so-called guardians of the right of free dissent and free expression — the media. They crawled when they had only been asked to bend, with many top editors assuming the ‘traditional Indian posture of respectful subservience (in which) they remained — not looking particularly dignified until the Emergency was over’. A dominant image of that time was a much publicised triptych in oils of Mrs. Gandhi by the colourful artist M.F. Husain, representing her as the goddess Durga triumphantly vanquishing her foes. The poor bore the brunt of the excesses of the Emergency, and ultimately, when elections were called, it was their hostility that defeated Indira. But the significant thing is the extent to which most Indians — poor and rich alike — were willing to quietly acquiesce in the abuse of power when in the first instance it seemed undefeatable

1. According to the author, democracy in India:
 - A) has flourished even in the absence of the democratic temperament
 - B) is detrimental to society as it reinforces patterns of domination.
 - C) is a mere farce as there is no actual exercise of democratic power.
 - D) is the most effective instrument for the cherished pursuit of power.

2. The author cites the instance of Indira Gandhi and her imposition of Emergency to primarily put forth which of the following points?
 - A) Strong leaders are venerated for the power they exude, not always for their democratic credentials.
 - B) The political opposition becomes virtually ineffective at times of political crisis.
 - C) Media and bureaucracy are mere instruments in the hands of political leaders, who exercise influence and control.
 - D) Undemocratic measures can bring about the political downfall of a leader.
3. Which of the following would be the most suitable title for the above passage?
 - A) The unexpected triumph of democracy in India
 - B) Existing discrimination within the Indian society.
 - C) Democratic politics in India - an instrument for reinforcing hierarchy.
 - D) Contradictions that characterise the working of the Indian democracy.
4. Why was democracy attractive to the Indian politicians?
 - A) They saw democracy as a means to enhance status.
 - B) They thought that it had the ability to provide legitimacy to hierarchies.
 - C) They were awed by the new values that it symbolised
 - D) All of the above.

Passage-2

In the days when Jean Piaget and Sigmund Freud dominated thinking about child development, small children were thought to be irrational, incoherent and solipsistic in their thinking, and both easily distractible and unfocused in their awareness of the world. Recent work in developmental psychology offers a sharply contrasted picture. Children are unconsciously the most rational beings on earth, brilliantly drawing accurate conclusions from data, performing complex statistical analyses, and doing clever experiments. And not only does empirical work reveal this about babies and small children, but what is thus revealed throws light on some of philosophy's more intriguing questions about knowledge, the self, other minds and the basis of morality.

Such are the claims made by philosopher and developmental psychologist Alison Gopnik in this fascinating account of the growth of child minds. Gopnik describes how imagination contributes to the vast amount of knowledge that children acquire in their first few years. Accumulated knowledge allows children to think of alternative ways that the world could be, which in turn helps them to construct mental maps of the causal relationships that govern and explain how things work. Imagination also aids them in forming ideas about how other people think and why they act as they do. Many children have 'imaginary friends'; their ability to understand others and to change themselves is aided by the possibilities for exploring alternatives that such play affords.

This learning proceeds, says Gopnik, in ways that a scientist would recognize as familiar: by experimentation and recognition of statistical patterns. In the child the application of these methods is unconscious and instinctive, and it is aided by the presence of caregivers who provide active instruction. But the basis of child learning is no different from the more conscious and deliberate methodology of adult enquirers.

Studies of child development also suggest insights into consciousness, one of philosophy's most recalcitrant mysteries. Children appear to have a far more vivid awareness of the world around them than adults do, Gopnik, reports, because an adult's 'spotlight awareness' that enables concentration on specific features of an environment involves losing the 'lantern awareness' that brings the whole environment to the forefront of attention. This childhood form of awareness is likened by Gopnik to how adults feel when they visit a foreign country; they focus less on particulars and experience everything more globally because so much is unfamiliar. But whereas children have a more intense lantern awareness, they also have less inner consciousness of the kind that helps manufacture a distinctive sense of self, that autobiographical centre of memory and planning which is the 'me' in all experience. That explains why they have less command of their behaviour, and less sense of the future.

Gopnik's affectionate and sympathetic enjoyment of the way children think in their first five years is manifest throughout her book, but so too is her sensitivity to the deeper philosophical implications of what their way of thinking can teach us. The result is absorbing and educative. This is despite the fact that, at times, it seems as if developmental psychology provides arduous scientific confirmation for what parents and preschool teachers have always long known; but Gopnik is skilled at producing the rabbit of insight from an apparently old hat. And there is also much that is new and surprising in the field, all of it promising to change our understanding of mind in general.

5. This passage is most likely an extract from
 - A) science journal
 - B) book review
 - C) news magazine
 - D) editorial in a newspaper

6. From the passage, which of the following would constitute a proper description of children's minds?
 - A) Children's minds are as developed and discerning as adult minds, with a full understanding of being.
 - B) Children's minds are not comparable to adult minds since they function differently and have less inner consciousness and a sense of perspective.
 - C) Children's minds tend to obtain a grasp of the whole environment rather than particular aspects of it, and thus have a higher philosophical sense of reality.
 - D) Children's minds tend to be exceedingly rational, discerning and innovative, and possess a kind of holistic awareness of the surroundings.
7. Which of the following is the process of the growth of children's minds, as described in the passage?
 - A) Children acquire knowledge through vivid imagination, which helps them construct mental maps of the world, and use this imagination to understand how people do or should behave around them.
 - B) Children acquire knowledge with the aid of their imagination, which helps them construct mental maps by exploring alternatives to how the world around them works and acts.
 - C) Children learn through imagination, and a wide range of such imagination enables them to learn vital habits as they grow.
 - D) Children possess an intrinsic ability to notice their whole surroundings, which helps them construct mind maps that enable a clearer perception of the world.
8. Which of the following best illustrates the distinction drawn between the awareness of a child's mind and that of an adult?
 - A) An adult is able to understand the intricacies of operating a new washing machine, while a child often attempts to experiment with the device.
 - B) At a wedding, a child excitedly looks around at the decorations, while an adult is lost in contemplation of the debts he incurred to make these decorations possible.
 - C) A child enjoys the festive atmosphere of a busy market replete with Christmas goods, but her mother is engrossed in looking for items on her shopping list.
 - D) A child gets frightened at the sound of thunder and begins to cry, while an adult is unruffled and merely draws out her umbrella expecting rain.

Passage-3

Classical physics defines the vacuum as a state of absence: a vacuum is said to exist in a region of space if there is nothing in it. In the quantum field theories that describe the physics of elementary particles, the vacuum becomes somewhat more complicated. Even in empty space, particles can appear spontaneously as a result of fluctuations of the vacuum. For example, an electron and a positron, or antielectron, can be created out of the void. Particles created in this way have only a fleeting existence; they are annihilated almost as soon as they appear, and their presence can never be detected directly. They are called virtual particles in order to distinguish them from real particles, whose lifetimes are not constrained in the same way, and which can be detected. Thus it is still possible to define that vacuum as a space that has no real particles in it.

One might expect that the vacuum would always be the state of lowest possible energy for a given region of space. If an area is initially empty and a real particle is put into it, the total energy, it seems, should be raised by at least the energy equivalent of the mass of the added particle. A surprising result of some recent theoretical investigations is that this assumption is not invariably true. There are conditions under which the introduction of a real particle of finite mass into an empty region of space can reduce the total energy. If the reduction in energy is great enough, an electron and a positron will be spontaneously created. Under these conditions the electron and positron are not a result of vacuum fluctuations but are real particles, which exist indefinitely and can be detected. In other words, under these conditions the vacuum is an unstable state and can decay into a state of lower energy; i.e., one in which real particles are created.

The essential condition for the decay of the vacuum is the presence of an intense electric field. As a result of the decay of the vacuum, the space permeated by such a field can be said to acquire an electric charge, and it can be called a charged vacuum. The particles that materialize in the space make the charge manifest. An electric field of sufficient intensity to create a charged vacuum is likely to be found in only one place: in the immediate vicinity of a superheavy atomic nucleus, one with about twice as many protons as the heaviest natural nuclei known. A nucleus that large cannot be stable, but it might be possible to assemble one next to a vacuum for long enough to observe the decay of the vacuum. Experiments attempting to achieve this are now under way.

9. Which of the following titles best describes the passage as a whole?
 - (A) The Vacuum: Its Fluctuations and Decay
 - (B) The Vacuum: Its Creation and Instability
 - (C) The Vacuum: A State of Absence
 - (D) Particles That Materialize in the Vacuum
10. According to the passage, the assumption that the introduction of a real particle into a vacuum raises the total energy of that region of space has been cast into doubt by which of the following?

- (A) Findings from laboratory experiments
- (B) Findings from observational field experiments
- (C) Accidental observations made during other experiments
- (D) Predictions based on theoretical work

11. Physicists' recent investigations of the decay of the vacuum, as described in the passage, most closely resemble which of the following hypothetical events in other disciplines?
- (A) On the basis of data gathered in a carefully controlled laboratory experiment, a chemist predicts and then demonstrates the physical properties of a newly synthesized polymer.
 - (B) On the basis of manipulations of macroeconomic theory, an economist predicts that, contrary to accepted economic theory, inflation and unemployment will both decline under conditions of rapid economic growth.
 - (C) On the basis of a rereading of the texts of Jane Austen's novels, a literary critic suggests that, contrary to accepted literary interpretations, Austen's plots were actually metaphors for political events in early nineteenth-century England.
 - (D) On the basis of data gathered in carefully planned observations of several species of birds, a biologist proposes a modification in the accepted theory of interspecies competition.
12. According to the passage, the author considers the reduction of energy in an empty region of space to which a real particle has been added to be
- (A) a well-known process
 - (B) a frequent occurrence
 - (C) a fleeting aberration
 - (D) an unexpected outcome

(13-14) Select the option that best captures the essence of the given text.

13. It was the great Jack Nicklaus who said: 'I'm a firm believer in the theory that people only do their best at a sport they truly enjoy. It is difficult to excel at something you don't enjoy.' If this is true of a sport, a pastime, how much more is it so of relationships, when you have to spend a lifetime together? A lifetime can be very long indeed, especially when it isn't fun anymore. We all have our ups and downs in relationships, but the ups had better be fun. Otherwise, a marriage can become a real hell when there is no longer any hope of having a happy life.
- A) Jack Nicklaus said that one can excel at a sport only if one enjoys it. The same applies to relationships. So, one must take care that one's marriage always remains enjoyable.
 - B) A lifetime is very long, so one must have fun, especially in relationships. Otherwise, it can be living hell. This is endorsed by Jack Nicklaus.
 - C) Jack Nicklaus opined that people only do their best at sports they truly enjoy. This is even more important for relationships. The downs in a marriage can be unbearable if the ups have not been fun.
 - D) According to Jack Nicklaus, both sports and relationships are alike, in that one can do well at them only if one enjoys oneself. A long lifetime can be unbearable if one's marriage is no longer fun.
14. Found in two percent of the population, Inventors are good at functional analysis, and have both a tolerance for and enjoyment of complex problems. Outgoing and intensely curious, they are apt to express interest in finding out about everything they come into contact with, and this can be a source of inspiration to others, who find themselves admiring the Inventor's insatiable hunger for knowledge. Inventors are also endlessly inventive, and are the most reluctant of all the types to do things in a particular manner just because that is the way things have always been done. They characteristically have an eye out for a better way, always on the lookout for new projects, new activities and new procedures.
- A) As part of two percent of the population, Inventors love to deal with complex problems, analyse, do things in a new way and inspire others.
 - B) Inventors are found only in two percent of the population. They excel at functional analysis, love inspiration, and enjoy solving complex problems, learning more and doing things in a new way.
 - C) Inventors, found in two percent of the population, are good at functional analysis; like complex problems; are curious, inspirational and inventive; and always have a yen for something better or new.
 - D) Found in two percent of the population, Inventors are characterized by inventiveness, curiosity and a hunger for knowledge. They tend to do things in innovative and non-traditional ways.

(15-16) Select the alternative that is logically out of context

15. A. Too much food appeared to 'extinguish' life in much the same way as putting too much wood on a fire smothers its flames.
- B. Yet longer life has also unleashed a cocktail of diseases and chronic conditions, attacking us in tandem, to blight our final years.
- C. If obesity led to disease and death, he thought, then perhaps restraint was the secret to a longer life?
- D. It was about 400 BC when Hippocrates astutely observed that gluttony and early death seemed to go hand in hand.

16. A. A recent study has found that the brains of rock pool-dwelling goby species are different from those of goby species that hide in the sand and don't need to jump to safety.
 B. When the tide goes out, frill-fins like to stay near shore, nestled in warm, isolated tide pools where they may find lots of tasty titbits.
 C. The frill-fin goby is a small fish of intertidal zones of both eastern and western Atlantic shores.
 D. But tide pools are not always safe havens from danger and it pays the frill-fin goby to make a hasty exit.

(17-18) Arrange the following sentences in correct order:

17. A. This happens because the governments have used the pension schemes to redistribute income from young workers to retired people.
 B. as population growth slows down, the number of old people grows and the burden of supporting them falls on a diminishing number of young people.
 C. the pension schemes eventually go bankrupt and the governments have to prop them up with subsidies funded out of taxes, paid mostly by the young people.
 D. pension schemes are poison pills: all through the western world, pension schemes have brought governments close to bankruptcy.
 E. the young object to having to support the old and thus class conflict is being replaced by age conflict.
18. A. the drastic rise in emissions, despite international efforts to cut carbon, will reportedly come despite enormous growth in the use of shale gas that has been predicted.
 B. the finding deals a blow to proponents of shale gas, who have argued that its use will cut emissions.
 C. global greenhouse gas emissions are set to rise by nearly a third in the next two decades, putting hopes of curtailing dangerous climate change beyond reach, a new report has found.
 D. shale gas, previously inaccessible because the exploitation of this resource requires technology that has only recently been perfected, will account for a rising proportion of the growth in energy in the years approaching 2035, but it will not cause a decline in greenhouse gases.
 E. burning gas produces much less carbon dioxide than burning coal, but the effect of a huge rise in shale gas exploration will not ameliorate the increase in emissions that scientists say will take the world to dangerous climate change.

(19-20): Select the alternative that best completes the given text:

19. Color is mostly irrelevant at night. Because of how the eye sees, even the most incendiary reds and oranges turn into a monochrome of silvers and greys under the waning moon. The retina, the sensitive lining of the eye's interior, is layered with the photoreceptive cells called rods and cones. Rods, which detect the intensity of light, can sense low levels of illumination. But cones, which distinguish colour, require a threshold of light higher than that provided by the fading moon. _____
 A. only in light brighter than moonlight can we see color.
 B. in the absence of that threshold, color washes away.
 C. yet, when we look at a moonlit landscape, we don't get the feeling of looking at a black and white world.
 D. but the rods help us see sufficiently well enough that we don't notice the muted colors.
20. The systematic study of how people acquire a second language is a fairly recent phenomenon, belonging to the second half of the twentieth century. Its emergence at this time is perhaps no accident. This has been a time of the 'global village' and the 'World Wide Web', when communication between people has expanded beyond their local speech communities. As never before, people have had to learn a second language, not just as pleasing pastime, but often as a means of obtaining an education or securing employment. _____
 A. at such a time, a better approach might be to find out what learners actually do, as opposed to what they think they do, when they try to learn a second language.
 B. at such a time, a question of considerable interest is what type of input facilitates learning a second language.
 C. at such a time, there is an obvious need to discover more about how second languages are learnt.
 D. at first sight, the meaning of the term 'second language acquisition' seems transparent, but, in fact, it requires careful explanation.

Answer Key:

1.A	2.A	3.D	4.A
5.B	6.D	7.B	8.C
9.A	10.D	11.B	12.D
13.C	14.C	15.B	16.A
17.DABCE	18.CADBE	19.B	20.C