

Modern European Drama PYQ 2023

PART-A

Write short notes on any three of following:

Q1. Education in Ghosts

Ans. "Ghosts" is a play by Henrik Ibsen that was first performed in 1881. The play explores themes such as family dynamics, morality, and societal expectations. Education is one of the prominent themes that is examined in the play.

The character of Oswald, who is the son of Mrs. Alving, is a representation of how education can be a double-edged sword. Oswald is portrayed as an intelligent and creative individual, who has been given the opportunity to receive a comprehensive education. However, despite his education, he still struggles with his personal demons and eventually succumbs to the disease inherited from his father.

The play suggests that **education, while necessary**, is not a panacea for all of life's problems. In fact, education can even lead to moral corruption if it is not accompanied by proper guidance and a strong sense of ethics. This is highlighted in the character of Pastor Manders, who is a conservative figure that believes in the value of a strict religious education. However, his narrow-mindedness and inability to think outside the box leads to the downfall of several characters, including Oswald.

Overall, the theme of education in "Ghosts" is a cautionary tale that highlights the importance of a well-rounded education that encompasses not only academic subjects but also moral and ethical values. The play suggests that education can be a powerful tool, but it must be wielded with care and accompanied by strong guidance to ensure that it does not lead to moral corruption or other negative consequences.

Q2. The function of the songs in The Good Person of Szechwan

Ans. "The Good Person of Szechwan" is a play by Bertolt Brecht that was first performed in 1943. The play is set in Szechwan, China, and tells the story of a prostitute named Shen Te who tries to live a virtuous life but is constantly hindered by the greed and corruption of those around her. Music and songs play a significant role in the play and serve several functions.

One of the primary functions of the songs in the play is to provide commentary on the action and themes of the play. The songs are often sung by a group of actors called the "chorus," who step out of character to offer their perspective on the events unfolding on stage. Through their songs, the chorus critiques the society depicted in the play, highlighting the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by the characters.

Another function of the songs in the play is to create a sense of **alienation or "estrangement"** in the audience. Brecht believed that traditional forms of theatre, which sought to create an illusion of

reality, encouraged passivity in the audience and did not foster critical thinking. To counteract this, Brecht employed a technique called "Verfremdungseffekt" or "alienation effect," which aimed to make the audience aware that they were watching a play and encourage them to think critically about the issues presented. The songs in "The Good Person of Szechwan" often use jarring or dissonant music to create a sense of estrangement and disrupt the audience's immersion in the story.

The songs in the play also serve to enhance the emotional impact of the story. For example, the character of Shen Te sings a poignant song called "The Song of the Hours" in which she laments her inability to balance her altruistic desires with her financial obligations. The song highlights the internal conflict faced by Shen Te and adds depth to her character.

In **conclusion**, the songs in "The Good Person of Szechwan" serve several functions, including providing commentary on the themes and action of the play, creating a sense of alienation in the audience, and enhancing the emotional impact of the story. Through their use of music and lyrics, the songs add depth and complexity to the characters and contribute to the overall impact of the play.

Q3. Jean's transformation in Rhinoceros

Ans. "Rhinoceros" is a play by Eugène Ionesco that was first performed in 1959. The play is set in a small town in France and explores themes such as conformity, individualism, and the rise of fascism. The character of Jean serves as a key example of the transformation that occurs throughout the play.

At the beginning of the play, Jean is portrayed as an intellectual and a skeptic. He is critical of the conformist tendencies of those around him and is quick to dismiss the strange behavior of the people who are turning into rhinoceroses as a mass hysteria or a hallucination. However, as the play progresses, Jean's skepticism begins to waver, and he becomes increasingly drawn to the rhinoceroses. He begins to view them as powerful and noble creatures and even begins to emulate their behavior, eventually turning into a rhinoceros himself.

Jean's transformation is **symbolic** of the dangers of conformity and the allure of power. At first, he resists the pressure to conform and maintain his individuality. However, as the rhinoceroses become more prominent, he is seduced by their power and their ability to dominate those around them. His transformation also highlights the ease with which individuals can be swept up in mass movements and lose their sense of self.

Overall, Jean's transformation in "Rhinoceros" is a **cautionary tale** that highlights the dangers of conformity and the allure of power. Through his journey, the play raises important questions about the nature of individuality, free will, and the role of the individual in society.

Q4. Franca Rame's use of theatre as a weapon of resistance

Ans. Franca Rame was an Italian playwright, actor, and political activist who used theatre as a means of resistance against social and political injustices. Her work often explored themes such as gender

inequality, domestic violence, and workers' rights, and sought to challenge the patriarchal and capitalist structures of society.

Rame's use of theatre as a weapon of resistance was deeply rooted in the Italian tradition of political theatre, which emerged in the 1960s as a response to the social and political upheavals of the time. Political theatre aimed to raise awareness of social and political issues and to mobilize audiences to take action against injustice. Rame's plays were often performed in unconventional venues, such as factories, schools, and community centers, in order to reach a wider audience and engage with people outside of traditional theatre circles.

One of Rame's most famous plays is "The Rape," which she wrote and performed with her husband, Dario Fo, in 1973. The play tells the story of a woman who is raped by a group of men and the subsequent cover-up by the police and the judiciary. Through the play, Rame and Fo aimed to expose the pervasive culture of violence against women in Italy and to challenge the victim-blaming attitudes of society.

Another example of Rame's use of theatre as a **weapon of resistance** is her play "A Woman Alone," which she wrote and performed in 1977. The play is a monologue that explores the experience of a woman who is trapped in a loveless marriage and subjected to domestic violence. Through the play, Rame sought to give voice to the experiences of women who were suffering in silence and to challenge the patriarchal structures that perpetuated their oppression.

Overall, Franca Rame's use of theatre as a weapon of resistance was a powerful tool for raising awareness of social and political issues and mobilizing audiences to take action against injustice. Her work continues to inspire artists and activists around the world who seek to use theatre as a means of resistance and social change.

Q5. Stanislavski's idea of truth in theatre

Ans. Konstantin Stanislavski was a Russian actor and director who is widely recognized as one of the most influential figures in the development of modern theatre. Central to his approach was the idea of truth in theatre, which he saw as a means of creating a deep connection between the actor and the audience.

Stanislavski believed that in order for a performance to be successful, the actors needed to fully embody the truth of their characters. This meant that they needed to fully understand the motivations, emotions, and psychology of their characters, and to convey these truths in a way that was both authentic and compelling. He believed that this could be achieved through a process of inner exploration and self-discovery, in which the actor draws on their own emotions and experiences to create a truthful portrayal of their character.

In **addition** to the importance of truth in performance, Stanislavski also emphasized the importance of ensemble work, the use of objectives, and the creation of a sense of realism on stage. He believed that actors needed to work together to create a cohesive and believable performance, and that this could only be achieved through a deep understanding of their characters and their relationships with each other.

Overall, Stanislavski's idea of truth in theatre was a ground breaking contribution to the development of modern theatre. His approach to acting and directing emphasized the importance of

authenticity and emotional depth in performance, and has influenced generations of actors and directors around the world.

PART-B

Q6. "Ibsen's Ghosts inaugurated an era of social and moral despair which remained central to the political and ideological parameters of naturalist drama of the late 19th century." Discuss.

Ans. Henrik Ibsen's play "Ghosts" is widely recognized as a seminal work of naturalistic drama. The play portrays the story of a family haunted by the sins of the past, exploring themes of societal hypocrisy, sexual repression, and familial duty. Through its uncompromising portrayal of taboo subjects, the play challenged the cultural norms of its time and inaugurated an era of social and moral despair that remained central to the political and ideological parameters of naturalist drama of the late 19th century.

At the time of its publication, "Ghosts" was highly controversial and was met with widespread criticism for its frank portrayal of taboo subjects such as sexually transmitted disease, incest, and suicide. However, Ibsen's portrayal of these taboo subjects was not intended to shock or offend his audience, but rather to expose the underlying hypocrisy of the societal norms and values that upheld them.

The naturalistic drama of the late 19th century, of which "Ghosts" was a major part, was characterized by a focus on realism and a rejection of the romantic idealism that had dominated earlier theatre. This movement was driven by a desire to expose the harsh realities of life and to challenge the traditional moral and social hierarchies of society. "Ghosts" was a pivotal work in this movement, as it showed that even the most respectable members of society could be corrupted by societal norms and values, and that these norms and values could have devastating consequences.

Overall, "Ghosts" inaugurated an era of social and moral despair in naturalist drama that remained central to the political and ideological parameters of the late 19th century. Its unflinching portrayal of taboo subjects and its critique of societal norms and values paved the way for a new form of theatre that was more concerned with exposing the harsh realities of life than with upholding traditional ideals.

Q7. Do you think the ending of The Good Person of Szechwan resolves the "problem of goodness" explored in the play? What in your view is Brecht trying in this play and with what degree of success?

Ans. The ending of Bertolt Brecht's "The Good Person of Szechwan" is often seen as ambiguous, and it is debatable whether it resolves the "problem of goodness" explored in the play. In the play, the central question is whether it is possible for someone to be both good and survive in a corrupt and selfish world. The play explores this question through the character of Shen Te, a prostitute who is initially praised for her generosity and selflessness, but ultimately finds it impossible to maintain this goodness in the face of the harsh realities of the world around her.

At the end of the play, Shen Te is revealed to be a persona adopted by the character Shui Ta, who is more ruthless and practical in his approach to life. While this may seem to resolve the problem of goodness by showing that it is impossible to be both good and survive in a corrupt world, the ending is also open to interpretation. Some may argue that the ending suggests that goodness is not impossible, but rather that it requires a certain degree of practicality and strategic thinking in order to be sustained.

In "**The Good Person of Szechwan**," Brecht is trying to expose the contradictions and injustices of society, and to challenge the audience to think critically about the world around them. He does this through a variety of techniques, including the use of alienation and distancing effects that disrupt the audience's emotional engagement with the characters and the story. Brecht's goal was to encourage the audience to think analytically and to remain intellectually engaged with the play, rather than simply being swept away by the emotions of the narrative.

In **terms of success**, "The Good Person of Szechwan" has been widely recognized as a landmark work of modern theatre. Brecht's techniques and ideas have influenced generations of playwrights and directors, and his commitment to social and political critique has inspired countless artists to use their work as a means of challenging the status quo. While it may be debated whether the play fully resolves the problem of goodness, it is undoubtedly a powerful exploration of the contradictions and complexities of the human experience, and a testament to the enduring power of theatre to provoke thought and inspire change.

Q8. All the characters of Ionesco's Rhinoceros are based on the political clichés of the 20th century." Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

Ans. Eugene Ionesco's play "Rhinoceros" is often seen as a critique of the rise of fascism in Europe in the mid-20th century. The play's central metaphor of people turning into rhinoceroses has been interpreted in a number of ways, including as a commentary on the dangers of conformity, the power of propaganda, and the seductive appeal of authoritarianism. It is true that many of the characters in the play can be seen as embodying political clichés of the time, but it is also worth noting that the play's themes and ideas continue to be relevant today.

One way to interpret the claim that all the characters in "Rhinoceros" are based on political clichés of the 20th century is to look at the ways in which the characters embody different political ideologies. For example, the character of Berenger can be seen as a stand-in for the individualistic, humanist values of the liberal tradition, while the character of Jean represents the authoritarian, collectivist values of the far right. Similarly, the character of Dudard can be seen as a representation of the bourgeois, middle-class values of the center-right, while the character of Botard embodies the pseudo-intellectualism and hypocrisy of the center-left.

However, it is also worth noting that "Rhinoceros" can be read as a more universal critique of human nature and the dangers of conformity. The play can be seen as a warning against the seductive appeal of groupthink and the dangers of following the crowd, regardless of the ideology in question. In this sense, the play's relevance extends beyond the specific political context of mid-20th century Europe and speaks to more universal themes and ideas.

In **conclusion**, while it is certainly true that many of the characters in "Rhinoceros" can be seen as embodying political clichés of the 20th century, the play's themes and ideas extend beyond the

specific political context of the time. The play's critique of conformity, authoritarianism, and the dangers of groupthink continue to be relevant today, and the play remains a powerful and enduring work of modern theatre.

Q9. Dario Fo's Can't Pay Won't Pay is deeply critical of social collectivity which doesn't allow spontaneous working-class action to grow and proliferate." Do you agree? Give a reasoned answer.

Ans. Dario Fo's play "Can't Pay? Won't Pay!" is a satirical comedy that critiques the social and economic conditions of working-class people in Italy in the 1970s. The play revolves around the struggles of a group of working-class women who engage in a series of spontaneous and sometimes illegal actions to cope with rising inflation and food prices. The play can be seen as a critique of the limitations of social collectivity in addressing the needs and concerns of working-class people, particularly in the face of economic and political forces that are often beyond their control.

One way to interpret the claim that "Can't Pay? Won't Pay!" is critical of social collectivity is to look at the ways in which the play depicts the struggles of working-class people to assert their agency and autonomy in the face of economic and political forces that are often hostile to their interests. The play shows how working-class people are often caught in a bind, where they are forced to choose between following the rules and regulations of the state or engaging in spontaneous and often illegal actions to meet their basic needs. The play also critiques the ways in which social collectivity can often be co-opted by the state or other powerful interests to maintain the status quo and prevent meaningful change from occurring.

However, it is also worth noting that "Can't Pay? Won't Pay!" can be read as a celebration of working-class agency and resistance in the face of difficult circumstances. The play depicts the struggles of working-class women as they fight for their dignity and autonomy, and the play's humor and satire can be seen as a way of empowering working-class people to challenge the dominant social and economic forces that constrain their lives.

In **conclusion**, while it is true that "Can't Pay? Won't Pay!" can be seen as critical of social collectivity, it is also a celebration of working-class agency and resistance in the face of difficult circumstances. The play is a powerful critique of the social and economic conditions that constrain the lives of working-class people, and it remains a relevant and important work of political theater.

Q10. Fo's Nobel Prize speech maintains a delicate balance between the contemporary relevance of his comic art and the universal relevance of comedy in debunking authority throughout human history". Discuss.

Ans. Dario Fo, the Italian playwright and performer, was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1997. In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Fo discusses the role of comedy in challenging authority throughout human history, while also reflecting on the contemporary relevance of his own comic art. Fo's speech maintains a delicate balance between these two themes, highlighting the universal relevance of comedy as a tool of political and social critique, while also emphasizing the particular challenges facing contemporary artists and activists.

Fo argues that comedy has always been a powerful tool for challenging authority and speaking truth to power. He cites examples from throughout human history, from the ancient Greek satyr plays to the commedia dell'arte of Renaissance Italy, to the political theater of his own time. Fo notes that comedy has often been used by marginalized and oppressed groups as a way of subverting dominant narratives and challenging the status quo.

At the same time, Fo is keenly aware of the challenges facing contemporary artists and activists, particularly in the face of growing political and economic inequality and the rise of right-wing populism. He acknowledges that comedy alone is not enough to address these challenges, but argues that it can be an important tool for raising awareness and mobilizing people to action. Fo also emphasizes the need for solidarity and collective action among artists and activists, noting that the struggle against authoritarianism and oppression requires a broad-based movement that can bring together people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

In **conclusion**, Fo's Nobel Prize speech is a powerful reflection on the role of comedy in challenging authority throughout human history. It maintains a delicate balance between the universal relevance of comedy as a tool of political and social critique and the particular challenges facing contemporary artists and activists. Fo's speech is a testament to the enduring power of comedy as a force for social change, and a call to action for artists and activists to use their talents and their voices to challenge oppression and build a more just and equitable world.