

Indian Writing in English PYQ 2017

Q1. Write a short note on the geographic and historical setting of Mirpore in Anita Desai's in Custody.

Ans. Mirpore, the fictional town in Anita Desai's novel "In Custody," is set in the heart of North India. The town serves as a significant backdrop for the story, providing a rich geographic and historical setting that shapes the narrative.

Geographically, Mirpore is located in the region of Uttar Pradesh, known for its fertile plains and diverse cultural heritage. The town is situated on the banks of the Ganges River, which plays a symbolic role throughout the novel. The river's presence signifies both the life force that sustains the land and the spiritual beliefs deeply ingrained in the people of Mirpore.

Historically, Mirpore reflects the layers of cultural and historical influences that have shaped the region over centuries. It carries remnants of Mughal architecture and traditions, indicating the town's historical connection to the Mughal Empire. The blending of Hindu and Muslim cultures is also evident in Mirpore, as seen in the architecture, festivals, and social fabric of the town.

Mirpore's historical setting becomes particularly significant within the context of the novel's storyline. As a struggling poet and literature professor, the protagonist, Deven, is sent to Mirpore to interview the famous and reclusive Urdu poet, Nur. The town's historical and cultural heritage provides a contrasting backdrop to Deven's contemporary struggles and his longing to connect with a fading artistic tradition.

Desai skillfully weaves the geographic and historical elements of Mirpore into the narrative, emphasizing the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. The town's physical landscape, its architecture, and its social customs serve as a reminder of a bygone era and the cultural treasures at risk of being lost in the face of societal changes.

In summary, Mirpore in "In Custody" is a fictional town in North India that encompasses a rich geographic and historical setting. Its location on the banks of the Ganges River and its blend of Mughal and local traditions contribute to the novel's exploration of cultural heritage and the clash between tradition and modernity.

OR

Q1. Comment on the use of the mock epic in the story "The Two Lady Rams".

Ans. "The Two Lady Rams" is a short story by Anita Desai that employs the mock epic form, which is characterized by the exaggerated and satirical treatment of a trivial or mundane subject matter. Desai's use of the mock epic in this story adds a touch of humor and irony to the narrative, inviting readers to question societal norms and expectations.

The story revolves around two middle-aged sisters, Shanti and Sarita, who are referred to as the "lady rams" due to their dominant personalities and strong-willed nature. Through the mock epic lens, Desai elevates the seemingly ordinary lives of these women to a grandiose scale, using epic conventions and language to depict their daily activities.

Desai employs epic elements such as grand descriptions, heroic epithets, and hyperbole to emphasize the absurdity and pompousness of the characters' actions. For example, Shanti and Sarita's simple act of going shopping is presented as a heroic quest, with their triumphs and tribulations narrated in an exaggerated and melodramatic manner.

The use of the mock epic in "The Two Lady Rams" serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it allows Desai to highlight the discrepancy between the characters' self-perception and their actual significance in the grand scheme of things. By presenting Shanti and Sarita's mundane lives as epic adventures, the story underscores the humorous gap between their inflated sense of importance and the triviality of their actions.

Furthermore, the mock epic form satirizes the rigid gender roles and societal expectations imposed on women in traditional Indian society. Through the larger-than-life portrayal of Shanti and Sarita, Desai challenges the notion that women's lives should be confined to domesticity and subservience. By embracing their assertiveness and strong personalities, the "lady rams" become unconventional heroines who defy societal norms.

In conclusion, the use of the mock epic in "The Two Lady Rams" adds a layer of satire and irony to the narrative, shedding light on the incongruities between the characters' perception of themselves and their actual significance. It serves as a tool for social commentary, questioning traditional gender roles and celebrating the strength and individuality of women.

Q2. Identify and critically comment on the following lines:

"With cargoes of sand and mortar
Mammon came to inspect the city.
He cut down the remaining trees
And carried them away
Like cadavers for dissection.
Morning papers like watered-down milk
Sell the same bland items :
Rape, extortion, ambushes, confessions,
Embezzlement, vendetta, sales
Marriages, the usual."

Ans. The excerpt you provided is a poem titled "Tines," presumably written by an unknown author. Let's analyze and comment on its content:

The poem presents a critical view of the impact of urbanization and commercialization on a city.

The opening lines evoke the arrival of Mammon, a biblical personification of greed and material wealth, who inspects the city. This imagery sets the tone for the poem's critique of capitalism and its consequences.

The line **"He cut down the remaining trees / And carried them away / Like cadavers for dissection"** highlights the destruction of nature and the exploitation of resources for economic gain. The metaphor of trees as cadavers suggests a disregard for the environment and a cold, detached approach to natural resources.

The following lines depict the news media as **"morning papers like watered-down milk" selling "the same bland items."** This metaphor implies that the news is diluted, lacking substance and critical analysis. It suggests that mainstream media often focuses on trivial or sensationalist stories rather than addressing the important issues plaguing society.

The list of items mentioned in the newspaper (**"Rape, extortion, ambushes, confessions, embezzlement, vendetta, sales, marriages, the usual"**) reflects a sense of disillusionment and desensitization to the recurring themes of crime, corruption, and societal problems. The use of the term "the usual" suggests a resignation to these issues, as if they have become normalized and expected.

Overall, the poem "Tines" presents a critical commentary on the negative consequences of unchecked capitalism, environmental degradation, and the superficiality of mainstream media. It highlights the destructive impact of human actions on nature and the erosion of moral values in society. By using vivid imagery and evocative language, the poem aims to provoke reflection and raise awareness about the consequences of prioritizing material gain over ethical considerations.

OR

Q2. Identify and critically comment on the following lines:

She has no friend on this cold, bleak earth

To give her a shelter, a home, and a nearly Through life's dreary desert alone she must wend,

For alas! the wretched have never a friend!

And should she stray from virtue's way,

The world will scorn. and its scorn ca

Ans. The lines you provided express a sense of loneliness, vulnerability, and the harsh judgment faced by someone who lacks support and falls outside societal norms. Let's analyze and comment on these lines:

"She has no friend on this cold, bleak earth

To give her a shelter, a home, and a nearly"

These lines evoke a feeling of **isolation and desolation**. The use of the phrases **"cold, bleak earth"** and **"no friend"** emphasizes the absence of companionship and support. It portrays a sense of

abandonment and suggests that the person being described lacks the comfort and security that a friend or a home could provide.

"Through life's dreary desert alone she must wend,

For alas! the wretched have never a friend!"

These lines further emphasize the **person's solitary journey through life**. The image of a "dreary desert" conveys a harsh and challenging existence. The use of the term "wretched" implies a state of suffering or misery, suggesting that this person is marginalized or oppressed. The repetition of the idea that the "wretched have never a friend" reinforces the sense of hopelessness and social exclusion.

"And should she stray from virtue's way,

The world will scorn, and its scorn can slay."

These lines highlight the harsh judgment and condemnation faced by someone who deviates from societal expectations or moral standards. The phrase "should she stray from virtue's way" implies that any departure from accepted norms will be met with scorn and disdain. The mention of the world's scorn as potentially lethal suggests that the consequences of deviating from societal expectations can be severe and destructive.

Critically, these lines draw attention to the lack of compassion and support for those who are marginalized or deemed "wretched" by society. They highlight the loneliness and vulnerability experienced by individuals who lack social connections and are subject to judgment and scorn. By emphasizing the harshness of societal norms and the potential consequences of deviating from them, these lines serve as a critique of a society that lacks empathy and fails to provide a safety net for those in need.

Overall, these lines evoke a sense of despair, emphasizing the isolation and judgment faced by someone who lacks friendship, support, and conformity to societal norms. They draw attention to the importance of empathy, compassion, and a more inclusive and understanding society.

Q3. What is the significance of the character of Ebenezer in Swami and Friends?

Ans. In the novel "Swami and Friends" by R.K. Narayan, the character of Ebenezer holds significant symbolism and serves as a catalyst for Swami's growth and self-realization. Here's the significance of Ebenezer:

Cultural Divide: Ebenezer, a foreign teacher at Albert Mission School, represents the cultural divide between the British colonizers and the Indian students. His presence highlights the clash between Western and Indian traditions, values, and education systems. Swami, as an Indian student, initially sees Ebenezer as an outsider and struggles to relate to him.

Authority Figure: Ebenezer is an authoritative figure at the school, representing the oppressive nature of British rule. He enforces strict discipline, and his presence creates a sense of fear and resentment among the Indian students. His presence acts as a catalyst for Swami's rebellious spirit, prompting him to question and challenge the established order.

Swami's Growth and Rebellion: Swami's encounters with Ebenezer lead to his gradual awakening and rebellion against the oppressive colonial system. Swami's interactions with Ebenezer force him to question authority, cultural imposition, and the validity of the British education system. Ebenezer's character becomes the driving force behind Swami's quest for freedom and independence.

Satirical Commentary: Ebenezer's character is also used to provide a satirical critique of the British colonial mindset. Through his exaggerated portrayal, the author exposes the absurdity and arrogance of the British colonizers. Ebenezer's rigid adherence to British values and his dismissive attitude towards Indian customs and beliefs highlight the cultural insensitivity and ignorance of the colonizers.

Humanizing Effect: Despite his negative portrayal, Ebenezer is not entirely one-dimensional. Towards the end of the novel, he experiences a personal tragedy, and this event humanizes him in Swami's eyes. Swami realizes that Ebenezer, like anyone else, is capable of feeling pain and suffering, which leads to a shift in Swami's perspective.

In **summary**, the character of Ebenezer in "Swami and Friends" represents the **cultural divide, oppressive authority, and satirical critique of the British colonial system**. His presence triggers Swami's growth, rebellion, and quest for independence. Additionally, Ebenezer's character undergoes a transformation that humanizes him, adding complexity to the narrative. Overall, Ebenezer serves as a catalyst for Swami's development and contributes to the exploration of themes related to identity, cultural clash, and freedom.

OR

Q3. Comment on the representation of cricket in Swami and Friends.

Ans. In R.K. Narayan's "Swami and Friends," cricket plays a significant role, serving as a symbol of both unity and division within the story. The representation of cricket highlights various themes and aspects of the characters' lives and the society in which they live. Here's a comment on the representation of cricket in the novel:

Camaraderie and Unity: Cricket serves as a unifying force, bringing together the boys of Malgudi and fostering a sense of camaraderie among them. The cricket matches provide a platform for friendship, teamwork, and shared experiences. The boys form a bond through their mutual love for the game, transcending social and cultural differences.

Escape and Fantasy: Cricket serves as an escape from the mundane realities of life. For Swami and his friends, playing cricket offers a break from school, strict discipline, and the pressures of growing up. The game becomes a realm of imagination and freedom, where they can temporarily forget their worries and indulge in their passion.

Competition and Rivalry: Cricket in the novel also showcases the competitive spirit and rivalries among the characters. The matches between the Board High School and the Albert Mission School highlight the rivalry between the Indian and British institutions. The matches become symbolic battles between the Indian students seeking to assert their identity and the British colonizers.

Symbolism of British Dominance: Cricket, being a sport introduced by the British, represents their cultural influence and dominance. The British teachers, including Ebenezer, excel in the game,

showcasing their superiority and reinforcing the power dynamic between the British colonizers and the Indian students.

Loss of Innocence: As the story progresses, cricket takes on a more serious and intense tone. The boys face the harsh reality of competition, unfair practices, and the consequences of failure. The loss of innocence in their cricketing experiences mirrors their gradual realization of the complexities and injustices of the world beyond childhood.

Overall, the representation of cricket in "Swami and Friends" encompasses themes of camaraderie, unity, competition, escapism, and the cultural dynamics between Indians and British colonizers. It serves as a powerful backdrop against which the characters' relationships, personal growth, and societal struggles unfold, offering insight into the larger context of the story.

Q4. In Custody is the English narration of the history of the Hindi Urdu controversy. Elaborate the point emphasizing the complex relationship between the three languages and their cultural markers as evident in the novel.

Ans. "In Custody" by Anita Desai indeed delves into the complex relationship between Hindi, Urdu, and English, exploring their cultural markers and the historical Hindi Urdu controversy. The novel portrays this linguistic and cultural interplay through its characters and their experiences. Here are some key points emphasizing the complex relationship between these languages and their cultural markers in the novel:

Language as Identity: The characters in "In Custody" are deeply connected to their linguistic identities. Urdu, Hindi, and English serve as markers of cultural heritage and social status. The protagonist, Deven, struggles with his own identity as he navigates his love for Urdu poetry while teaching Hindi, the more widely accepted language.

Language as Power: The novel examines how language and its mastery can symbolize power dynamics and social hierarchies. Urdu, associated with the Mughal era and considered more refined and sophisticated, is seen as a language of prestige. In contrast, Hindi, associated with the local populace, is often seen as a language of the common people. English, representing colonial rule, carries its own set of connotations and privileges.

Cultural Influence: "In Custody" highlights how language is deeply intertwined with cultural traditions and artistic expression. Urdu poetry plays a central role in the novel, showcasing its beauty, richness, and cultural significance. It becomes a source of pride and longing for Deven, who sees himself as a custodian of Urdu literature and tries to preserve its heritage.

Historical Linguistic Controversy: The novel reflects the historical Hindi Urdu controversy, which emerged during the partition of India and the subsequent attempts to define national languages. This controversy and the associated politics are alluded to in the tensions between Hindi and Urdu and the debates surrounding their usage and promotion.

Language and Change: "In Custody" also explores the impact of societal changes on language and cultural traditions. The novel portrays a shifting landscape where English gains prominence as a global language, threatening the survival and relevance of Urdu. This evolution raises questions about the preservation of cultural heritage and the challenges faced by those who want to protect traditional languages.

By highlighting the complex relationship between Hindi, Urdu, and English, "In Custody" brings attention to the interconnectedness of language, culture, and identity. The novel reflects the historical and societal contexts that shape language politics and the struggles faced by individuals caught in the midst of linguistic controversies.

OR

Q4. "No woman in Anita Desai's novels .. has been fortunate enough to free herself from the shackles of femininity." Comment on the author's portrayal of women characters in the novel In Custody with reference to this statement.

Ans. The statement suggests that Anita Desai's novels do not portray women characters who are able to liberate themselves from the constraints of femininity. In the case of "In Custody," while the female characters may not completely break free from societal expectations, Desai's portrayal of them is more nuanced. Let's examine the women characters in the novel and their relationship with femininity:

Sarla: Sarla is Deven's wife, and her character embodies many traditional gender roles and expectations. She conforms to the societal norms of being a wife and mother, dedicating herself to domestic duties. However, as the story progresses, Sarla begins to question and challenge these roles. She desires more intellectual stimulation and resents the limited opportunities available to her as a woman. While she may not entirely break free from femininity, her character demonstrates a sense of frustration and a yearning for personal growth.

Imtiaz Begum: Imtiaz Begum is an enigmatic figure in the novel, known for her exceptional singing talent. While she is portrayed as an object of desire and fascination for many male characters, her true nature and desires remain elusive. Imtiaz Begum's character challenges traditional notions of femininity by embodying mystery and independence. She represents a form of femininity that defies easy categorization.

Leela: Leela is Deven's sister and plays a minor role in the novel. She is portrayed as a traditional housewife, caring for her children and performing domestic duties. Leela's character aligns more closely with conventional femininity, highlighting the societal expectations placed on women.

It is worth noting that while Desai's female characters may grapple with societal expectations and restrictions, they are not completely devoid of agency or individuality. Desai presents them as complex individuals with their own desires, frustrations, and struggles. Their experiences shed light on the limitations imposed by society, but they also show moments of resistance and resilience.

In "In Custody," Desai explores the ways in which societal norms and gender roles impact the lives of women. While the female characters may not achieve complete liberation from the shackles of femininity, their stories depict the conflicts and complexities of navigating traditional expectations. Desai's portrayal invites readers to question societal norms and consider the various ways women negotiate their identities within a patriarchal society.

Q5. "... it is difficult to see how they (Indian poets writing in English) can develop as poets in a language which they have learnt from books and seldom hear spoken in the streets or even in their own homes." Do you think Indian English poetry captures the "authentic" Indian reality? Explain with reference to the work of two poets you have read.

Ans. The statement raises an important question about the authenticity of Indian English poetry and its ability to capture the "authentic" Indian reality. The authenticity of Indian English poetry lies in its ability to convey a genuine reflection of Indian experiences, emotions, and cultural nuances, despite being written in a language that may not be commonly spoken in everyday life. To explore this further, let's examine the work of two Indian English poets: Agha Shahid Ali and Kamala Das.

Agha Shahid Ali: Agha Shahid Ali's poetry often explores themes of love, loss, exile, and the Kashmiri identity. His poems evoke a profound sense of longing, nostalgia, and the anguish of being uprooted from one's homeland. Through his mastery of language and vivid imagery, Ali captures the essence of the Kashmiri experience, both in terms of cultural specificity and universal human emotions. Despite writing in English, his poetry resonates deeply with readers and effectively conveys the rich complexities of his Indian heritage.

Kamala Das: Kamala Das, known for her bold and confessional poetry, delves into themes of gender, sexuality, and societal expectations. Her work challenges societal norms and speaks openly about the female experience in India. Despite being written in English, her poetry offers a raw and honest portrayal of the Indian reality, particularly from a woman's perspective. Das' evocative and intimate language, coupled with her exploration of personal and cultural identity, makes her poetry a powerful representation of the Indian experience.

Both Agha Shahid Ali and Kamala Das demonstrate that Indian English poetry can capture the "authentic" Indian reality by conveying the specific nuances and emotions of Indian life, culture, and identity. These poets infuse their work with personal experiences, historical references, and cultural contexts, allowing readers to engage with and understand the intricacies of Indian society.

While it is true that Indian English poets may have learned the language primarily through books and may not hear it spoken widely in their daily lives, their deep engagement with the language and their rootedness in Indian culture enable them to craft poetry that reflects the diverse realities of the country. Indian English poetry acts as a bridge between the Indian experience and a global audience, fostering a unique literary space that captures the complexities, contradictions, and beauty of India's diverse realities.

OR

Q5. Discuss Nissim Ezekiel's "Enterprise" as a journey, a search for home, of both an individual and a community.

Ans. "Enterprise" by Nissim Ezekiel can indeed be interpreted as a journey and a search for home, both at the individual and communal levels. The poem explores the experiences of a speaker who feels alienated and displaced in a changing society. Let's examine how "Enterprise" embodies these themes:

Individual Journey: The poem presents a personal journey of self-discovery and self-realization. The speaker embarks on a quest to find his own identity and place in the world. The use of the first-

person narrative voice conveys the speaker's personal struggles and desires. Throughout the poem, there is a sense of restlessness and longing for a sense of belonging and purpose.

Search for Home: The poem also captures the universal longing for a home, both in a physical and metaphorical sense. The speaker seeks a place where he can find solace, stability, and a sense of belonging. This search for home reflects the desire for a space where one's cultural, social, and emotional needs are fulfilled.

Collective Displacement: Beyond the individual journey, "Enterprise" also reflects the communal displacement experienced by a larger group of people. The poem addresses the Indian diaspora and their struggles to find a sense of home and cultural identity in a foreign land. The speaker represents the collective experiences of a community that is caught between their Indian roots and the challenges of assimilation into a new culture.

Cultural Tensions and Conflicts: The poem explores the tension between the speaker's Indian heritage and the pressures to conform to Western cultural norms. The references to Western influences and the speaker's rejection of them highlight the struggle to maintain cultural authenticity and navigate the clash between tradition and modernity.

The Journey as a Metaphor: The journey described in "Enterprise" serves as a metaphor for the larger quest for self-discovery, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging. It embodies the challenges, uncertainties, and hopes encountered in the process of searching for one's place in the world.

Overall, "Enterprise" by Nissim Ezekiel presents a journey and search for home at both the individual and communal levels. The poem explores themes of identity, displacement, cultural conflicts, and the longing for a sense of belonging. Through its evocative language and personal voice, the poem offers a poignant reflection on the challenges and aspirations of individuals and communities in a changing world.

Q6. Write an essay on the colonial education system in Swami and Friends.

Ans. Title: The Colonial Education System in "Swami and Friends"

Introduction:

R.K. Narayan's novel "Swami and Friends" provides a vivid portrayal of the colonial education system in India during the early 20th century. Set in the fictional town of Malgudi, the novel delves into the effects of British colonialism on education and its impact on the young protagonist, Swaminathan, and his peers. This essay explores the colonial education system depicted in the novel, shedding light on its limitations, cultural implications, and the struggles faced by Indian students.

Colonial Education and Its Objectives:

The British colonial education system in India aimed primarily at producing a class of Indian elites who would serve as intermediaries between the British administration and the local population. The curriculum focused on English language proficiency, British literature, history, and science, while neglecting native languages, traditions, and cultural knowledge. The goal was to create a docile and subservient class that would perpetuate British rule.

Imposition of English and Cultural Alienation:

The novel portrays the imposition of the English language as a central aspect of the colonial education system. Indian students were forced to abandon their mother tongue and adopt English as the medium of instruction. This linguistic shift led to a sense of cultural alienation, as students were detached from their heritage and struggled to reconcile their Indian identities with the imposed British values and norms.

The Influence of British Teachers:

"Swami and Friends" vividly portrays the presence of British teachers who personify the colonial education system. Mr. Ebenezer, the headmaster of the Albert Mission School, exemplifies the superiority and disdain exhibited by some British educators towards their Indian students. He uses corporal punishment and suppresses native languages, instilling fear and submissiveness in the students. The power dynamics between the British teachers and Indian students underscore the hierarchical nature of the colonial education system.

Limited Scope and Cultural Suppression:

The curriculum in the novel is devoid of Indian literature, history, and cultural references. The focus on British texts and perspectives marginalizes Indian knowledge and traditions, eroding the students' connection to their own heritage. The colonial education system effectively suppresses Indian culture, reinforcing a sense of cultural inferiority and dependence on British norms.

Resistance and Critique:

Throughout the novel, characters like Swami and his friends question the relevance and impact of the colonial education system. They rebel against the rigid discipline, find solace in their native languages, and seek moments of freedom and self-expression. Their acts of resistance signify a growing awareness of the limitations and dehumanizing aspects of the education system.

Conclusion:

"Swami and Friends" provides a critical examination of the colonial education system prevalent during British rule in India. The novel portrays the cultural alienation, imposition of English, and suppression of Indian knowledge inherent in the system. While the education system aimed to create a subservient class, it also unintentionally sparked resistance and fostered a sense of identity and cultural pride among Indian students. Narayan's novel serves as a valuable reminder of the historical legacy and lasting impact of colonial education on Indian society and the continued importance of reclaiming and celebrating indigenous knowledge and traditions.

OR

Q6. What is the significance of the title of Mistry's story "The Swimming Lessons"?

Ans. The title "The Swimming Lessons" in Rohinton Mistry's story holds significant symbolism and reflects the underlying themes and motifs explored in the narrative.

Literal Meaning: On a surface level, the title refers to the swimming lessons given by Mr. Mackenzie, the swimming instructor, to the protagonist's son, Gustad. The swimming lessons serve as a recurring motif throughout the story, highlighting the importance of learning and adapting to new experiences.

Metaphorical Significance: Beyond its literal meaning, the title carries metaphorical implications that resonate with the broader themes of the story. Swimming symbolizes the challenges and struggles of life, as well as the need to overcome fear and uncertainty. The act of learning to swim becomes a metaphor for navigating through difficult circumstances, taking risks, and finding resilience in the face of adversity.

Personal Transformation: Gustad's journey in the story parallels his son's swimming lessons. As Gustad grapples with various personal and societal challenges, he undergoes his own metaphorical "swimming lessons." He is forced to confront his fears, adapt to changing circumstances, and learn to navigate the turbulent currents of life. The title captures Gustad's transformation and his journey towards self-discovery and growth.

Symbolism of Water: Water, a prominent element in swimming, holds symbolic significance in the story. It represents the unpredictable nature of life, its fluidity, and the potential for both danger and renewal. The swimming lessons, therefore, become a metaphorical exploration of Gustad's relationship with life's uncertainties, emphasizing the need to dive in and confront challenges head-on.

Parental Guidance and Mentorship: The swimming lessons in the story also reflect the role of parental guidance and mentorship. Mr. Mackenzie's patient instruction and support serve as a metaphor for the guidance and mentorship that Gustad provides to his own children. The title highlights the importance of such guidance in navigating life's obstacles and helping others learn and grow.

In conclusion, the title "The Swimming Lessons" in Rohinton Mistry's story encompasses both literal and metaphorical meanings. It signifies the act of learning to swim as a metaphor for facing life's challenges, personal transformation, the symbolism of water, and the role of guidance and mentorship. The title sets the tone for the story and reflects the themes and motifs explored throughout the narrative.