



REALISM AND THE CONTEMPORARY NOVEL: A STUDY OF ANITA DESAI'S *IN CUSTODY*

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is a discussion of Anita Desai's novel *In Custody* in the light of various dimensions of realism as pointed out by Raymond Williams, a dominant literary personality in his essay *Realism and The contemporary novel* taken from his book *The Long Revolution*. Here Williams makes a cultural inquiry in literary composition. The word realism is not new. In fact, literary realism is the trend, beginning with mid nineteenth century French literature and extending to late nineteenth and early twentieth century authors, towards depictions of contemporary life and society as it was, or is. Yet realism is not some specific object to be pinned down. In fact it is a way of describing certain method and attributes used in the development of experience. Williams sets out to drive some generalizations and gives his versions of realism keeping in mind the techniques used in the contemporary fiction. Williams fourfold classification of realism in contemporary novel, into social documentary, social formula, personal documentary and personal formula can be aptly applied to Desai's novel *In Custody* which although being a fictional work is grounded to expose realities. It portrays the life experiences not only through the enrichment of the locales with natural beauty and the depiction of social, political, religious or economic dilemma or diversity in contemporary living but also by exploring the psyche of the character.

Key Words: Realism, contemporary novel, personal formula novel, social documentary novel.

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Raymond Williams in his essay *Realism and The contemporary novel* reconsiders the various descriptions of realism and sets out to drive some generalizations on the methods and substance of contemporary fiction. Williams gives an insight on the existing variations of the term realism, his views on the development of the modern novel and lastly a possibly new meaning of Realism.

By using the Russian terms like Narodnost, Tipichimost, Ideanot and Partisonst, Williams illustrates the social realism in a novel. According to

him the novelist presents realism as noraodnost 'the technical effect as an expression of spirit opposite to formalist'. It rejects an ordinary technical meaning of realism where as the term Idieanot and Partinost refer to the Ideological content and Partison affiliations to such realism. Thus these terms suggest the development of the ideological or revolutionary attitudes. Finally Williams uses the term "Tipichimost' as portrayal of typical characters in a typical situation. Through Marxist thought, this idea of realism is developed.

In the nineteenth century in the west, it was assumed that the realistic novel “went out with the handsome cab”. But Williams points out that in majority of the modern novels, the ordinary criteria of realism still exists in the sense that elements of ordinary everyday experience are more evident in the modern novel than in the 19th century. Also the modern novel consists of those startling or offensive elements which were one of the purposes of realism to describe. Talking of psychological novel, William says that the realistic novel has been replaced by the term psychological novel, but still realism as an intention in the description of these states of consciousness has not been abandoned. The only change that has come in the description of this everyday ordinary reality is in the use of new techniques used to present the new kind of reality.

Thus here Williams begins to present before us a fourfold classification of realism in contemporary novel, its broad classification being social novel and personal novel. Then again with the social we have social documentary and social formula. Also like the social novel we have two divisions of personal novel as personal documentary and personal formula.

The general distinction made between the social novel and personal novel is that in the social novel there may be accurate observation and description of the general life i.e the aggregation and in the personal novel there may be accurate observation and description of persons, the units. But each lacks a dimension, for the way of life is neither aggregation nor unit, but a whole indivisible process.

Now the distinction between social documentary and social formula is this: The social documentary deals with a particular society or community. He says “if we want to know about life in a town, or in a university or on a merchant ship, or in a patrol in Burma this is the book. Furthermore he adds, “of all current kinds of novel, this kind at its best is apparently nearest to what I am calling the realistic novel.” Thus the documentary concentrates on looking at a particular context and it looks at a defined way of life – a mining town a ship or whatever- and the characters are simply illustrations of the way of life.

Then talking about the social formula novel Williams says, “a particular pattern is abstracted from the sum of social experience and a society is created from this pattern.” As we find the novels like ‘A brave new world’, ‘Nineteen Eighty Four’ are powerful social fiction in which a pattern taken from contemporary society is materialized in another time or place. Thus the formula novel looks at particular social relations against a backdrop of an imagined society. They work with assumptions about the relation of individual to society. The same point holds for personal novel and its corresponding divisions into documentary and formula.

This fourfold classification of realism of Williams which is the focal point of his essay can be appropriately applied to Anita Desai’s novel *In Custody*.

In custody by Anita Desai is a touching and wonderful book. This is all about the happenings of a small town professor while he goes to North India. The ups and down of the human mind is illustrated in a beautiful way. The protagonist’s dream project of interviewing his dream man ends up in disaster and he remains deserted at the end of the story.

The novel initiates with an air of gloom hung over in the atmosphere of Mirpore, the small village-ish town giving shelter and occupation to the novel’s protagonist, Deven. Deven is a simple professor of a college in the department of Hindi. But nothing is okay in his life. His wife is unhappy with him, his students do not listen to him or respect him and all those around him take advantage of him. He writes in his beloved Urdu language but for practical reasons, given the lack of demand for Urdu, teaches Hindi Literature. Deven feels frustrated due to lack of appreciation. He has fond memories of his childhood and his deceased father who was a lover of Urdu poetry . After his father’s death, he lost ‘good times’, his mother brought him to Delhi from Lucknow and he had to study in a Hindi medium school. Deven associates Urdu with his father and with good times: ‘I studied Urdu, sir, as a boy, in Lucknow. My father, he was a school teacher, a scholar, and a lover of Urdu poetry. He taught me the language. But he died. He

died and my mother brought me to Delhi to live with her relations here. I was sent to the nearest school, a Hindi medium school, sir'. Shadowing all these is his reminiscence of his dreams of becoming a poet that he had to give up in order to bring in money for his wife and son.

Into this dismal world, comes a ray of hope in the form of his wealthy childhood friend and companion, Murad. Murad is the editor of an Urdu magazine that aims to publish long lost unpublished pieces of poems of high artistic value of the once famous, feeble poet Nur Shahjenahabad. Deven being an Urdu lover leaps in joy as Murad gives him the opportunity to interview the poet, something that he had wished since the time he relished the penmanship of Urdu poets and novelists. When he gets a chance to interview Nur, his enthusiasm knows no bounds. He accepts, despite the risk of losing both his job and family. But Deven is exploited (when he agrees to work free for Murad under duress) by his friend Murad to interview the noted Urdu poet Nur Shahjahanabadi for a 'special issue'. Deven does so to overcome his guilt that he is not doing anything in the field of Urdu literature. The editor Murad wished to do something new that would perhaps increase the sale of his Urdu magazine.

Deven, with this decision of going to Delhi, becomes more close to the long forgotten Old Delhi and its poetic tradition which was not possible in the small town of Mirpore and is able to bridge the gap of '*impassable desert that lay between him and the capital with its lost treasures of friendships, entertainment, attractions and opportunities.*' With all his hardships, Deven goes to interview Nur. He tells Nur about his love for Urdu literature. He also tells him that he is working as a temporary lecturer in Hindi literature to earn a living. Nur dismisses this excuse with contempt, suggesting that Deven should have chosen to trade in rice and oil if earning a living was his first priority. This dismissal itself shows a sharp indication of the culture in old times, when, to follow literature, people would leave their family and would sacrifice everything to practice knowledge or literature. To earn money was easy and even a trader could do so. When Deven reaches Nur's house, they discuss the politics

of languages. He tells Deven: '*I tell you, those Congress-wallahs have set up Hindi on top as our ruler. You are its slave. Perhaps a spy even if you don't know it, sent to the universities to destroy whatever remains of Urdu, hunt it out and kill it...It seems you have been sent here to torment me, to show me what depths Urdu has fallen.*'

The twist in the tale occurs when he finds how the life of Nur whom he considered as the epitome of reverence and regard, the God of Urdu poetry, is fraught with misery and poverty - not only poverty in the sense of the lack of material goods but the poverty of the mind, the psyche. When Deven visits the person Nur he becomes totally disappointed seeing his lifestyle. He is old surrounded by flattering crawlers, married to a younger calculating wife who wants to use his glory to win herself fame. He is not only plagued by ill-health but also by his surroundings. The competition between his two wives, the noise and chaos of the fanatics, and the absence of decorum all combined create a distorted atmosphere, an unaesthetic ambience. Deven's thoughts were totally shattered.

Deven, a shrinking and weak man, is somehow drawn to this old poet, wishing to help and protect him even as he cannot defend himself. Perhaps it is the tie of Urdu poetry that he remembers from his treasured times as a child with his father.

In order to save the name and works of Nur for posterity, he decides to record his voice on tape for his small-town university. The recorder (due to various reasons), however fails to record '*the voice of traditional Urdu poetry*' by the legendary poet Nur. '*It was a fiasco. There was no other word for it. Disbelievably, Deven had the first tape removed, the second tried and then the third and the fourth.*' Murad's implications (to capture Urdu poetry in Awaz, the voice) results in recorded (poetic) silences symbolizing '*the silence of Urdu poetry.*' '*It was absolutely still, very serene. It was in fact the silent answer to his questioning.*'

But in this way Deven is exploited monetarily and emotionally where Nur's family and hangers on demand money to keep themselves happy. Murad refuses to pay him for submissions to

his self-proclaimed literary magazine. It's Deven who gets entangled in the innumerable chains of difficulties surmounting Nur in the process of his interview. The interview turns out to be less of an oration of his lost poetry and more a revelry comprising rum, kebabs, biryani and gluttonous talks combined with an inefficient assistant and a second hand tape recorder meant to record Nur's voice. As he reels in the heat between the chaotic magazine office and the poet's rickety residence, beset by the incompetents and exploiters at every turn, Deven constantly questions his ability to complete his task, but never gives up.

Thus the whole novel portrays a descending trajectory of Deven and the rise of miseries coupled with misfortunes. His wife Sarla is indignant at his time away. His fellow professors were also against to him. His fellow professors think he is having an affair in Delhi or push him to get taping of Nur's voice. The saddest part is the result of the sessions. Drunk and encouraged by his admirers who follow him along to the sessions, Nur offers nothing new. The session between Nur and Deven gives amazing perception about life.

The ups and downs of human life, the upheavals in relationship are nicely crafted in this novel. A novel of shattered emotion and scattered dreams *In Custody* reflects the intricacies of relationships.

Thus Anita Desai has attempted to capture the scene of the 'Indian middle class' realistically in her novel. Her writing might be fictitious but she blends the textual fabrics of the narrative with historical realism. Her novels are reflection of Indian society, politics, and character. Critics place Anita Desai along with Vikram Seth and call them 'literary realists'. Desai captures the true identity of India in her novels.

Here, in the novel a parallel is drawn between Urdu and Hindi juxtaposed with the change of cultural dynamics after the partition of India. Desai discusses the tragedy of Urdu poetry, the disillusionment of the Muslim poet, the frustration of the post-colonial society and the psychological insight into the various characters. Desai captures the nostalgia of 'lyrical romance' of the cultural tradition of Old Delhi and here she tries

to seize poetry and music from 'the dark gullies' that were the preferred amusements of the royal courts in Delhi. The theme of language is mixed with religion and politics. The greatness of the novel lies in the fact that it exposes the defeated cause of promotion of Urdu poetry. The reasons might be political, social or regional. Desai captures the pain of loss of the melodious poetry in Urdu language, which at one point of time, was considered the language of the elite. But after independence of India Hindi became the national language of India. Urdu, along with the other languages, is one of the official languages of India as given in the eighth schedule of the Constitution of India. Urdu remained alive with the lyrical romance of Urdu Shayari (poetry). The novelist portrays a true picture of the plight of poets and masters (teachers) struggling for existence but plays safe by avoiding discussion on the role of religious and political demagogues, which is unlike Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* that provoked controversy as soon as it was published. Desai's narratives cleverly deal with Indian identity with respect to socio-cultural, socio-linguistic and politico-religious divides without causing controversial and polemic debates.

In Custody presents a true portrayal of the protagonist Deven, who is Hindu, and who has high regard for Urdu language and culture, and the Muslim Nur, the great Urdu poet, who is no longer in demand. When Deven, applies in person for one week's leave to interview the legendary Urdu poet Nur Shahjahanabadi, his head of department, Trivedi, meets the request with a bitter, short-tempered and communally charged reaction: '*I'll get you transferred to your beloved Urdu department. I won't have Muslim toadies in my Department; you'll ruin my boys with your Muslim ideas, your Urdu language. I'll complain to the Principal, I'll warn the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) you are a traitor*'.

The novel sharply highlights the social and cultural changes in post-colonial India. With the description of Delhi and Nur, Desai creates a picture perfect image of the Old Delhi culture. Deven, the protagonist, nurtures his dream to create a mark in the world of Urdu literature. He associates Urdu

with 'good times' and looks upon the language as divine. Later, when 'bad times' befall upon him, he has to teach Hindi Literature at Lala Ram Lal College of Mirpore. He considers himself to be caught in the profession to 'earn a living' by teaching Hindi literature to uninterested college students. He is neither appreciated nor regarded by the students, who make fun of him. They do not respect him as a teacher. His career choice is based on the market economy that favors Hindi but is still not lucrative. He continues to teach Hindi to sustain his corporeal needs but his imagination is fueled by Urdu. He says: *'I am—only a teacher ... and must teach to support my family. But poetry—Urdu— ... I need to serve them to show my appreciation'*. Lala Ram Lal College could open a department of Urdu as it received a *'very large donation from the descendants of the very Nawab who had fled Delhi in the aftermath of the 1857 mutiny...'* Siddiqui and his deteriorating *Haveli* truly capture *'the dying culture he represents'*. Anita Desai tries to shape history of the small town of Mirpore by linking it to the presence of Muslim aristocracy- a long forgotten Nawab whose ancestors fled Delhi to escape the aftermaths of the 1847 mutiny, an aristocratic *Haveli*, and a Mosque.

Desai also realistically captures the nostalgia of 'lyrical romance' of the cultural tradition of Old Delhi. While 'poetry, music and elephant fights were the preferred amusements of the court', Desai captures poetry and music. Nur is the sole representative of a dying Muslim tradition of poetry, mega-*Haveli* (mansion), *Mehfils* (parties), with 'rich *Biryani* (food) washed down by the enormous amount of alcohol' and a certain aristocratic lifestyle (extravagant and self-indulgent) of a long lost Muslim Nawab of the nineteenth century.

Thus Anita Desai's novel here clearly takes the pattern of the descriptive social novel as defined by Raymond Williams.

Anita Desai is known for the exposure of realities not only through the enrichment of the locales with natural beauty and the depiction of social, political, religious or economic dilemma or diversity in contemporary living but also by exploring the psyche of the character.

Thus Desai also lays out the psychological reality of Deven. As Anita Desai remarks about Deven, *'he realizes that he loved poetry not because it made things immediate but because it removed them to a position where they became bearable'*. Deven's frustration is evident. He wants to run away from his monotonous work life and the expectations of his middleclass wife. He wants to transcend into some other world with the melancholic Urdu poetry.

Then Anita Desai moves forward to portray a realistic picture of Imtiaz Begum, Nur's second wife. She is the courtesan (a former dancer). She utilizes her situation in the best possible manner and pursues Urdu poetry. She uses her poetry in garb of Nur's poetry in her (It is Nur's poetic assembly but she takes over as people come to listen to her) poetic assembly at Nur's House. She befriends Deven and challenges him for not being fair to her. Imtiaz Begum considers herself 'an intellectual' and 'no less' than Nur in poetic gifts. She says, *'Dear friend, I beg to put it to you that you have insulted my intelligence by your deception...you thought I was a prostitute who dazzled Nur Sahib's eyes with my dance and so inveigled my way out of a house of prostitution into the house of a distinguished poet...Kindly remember that unlike Nur Sahib and unlike your respected self, I am a woman and have had no education but what I have found and seized for myself...When you rose to your feet and left the mehfil while I was singing my verse, was it not because you feared I might eclipse the verse of Nur Sahib and other male poets whom you revere? Was it not intolerable to you that a woman should match their gifts and even outstrip them?' She sends her manuscript to Deven for critical analysis. When Deven rejects her work (by tearing up the poems she sent) she is heartbroken. 'In this unfair world that you have created what else could I have been but what I am? Ask yourself that when you peruse my verses, if you have the courage...'*. Thus here we find a true reflection of the situation of women in the male dominated world wherein their growth is stunted and obstructed—The wholeness which they desire to achieve, at any cost, still eludes them.

Anita Desai is a writer who does not

believe in weaving the plots of her novel merely on a figment of imagination. As one delves into the world of Desai, one feels that although a work of fiction, her creations are grounded in life experience. It is important to mention that her texts are often subjective and represent realistically the existential "duality" we as individuals, often face. As life offers various options at every step of life, it becomes really very difficult to decide what actually should be done and the same argument carries more weight considering the fact that Desai's individual is often "free" to "choose."

In Custody is a novel which is somewhat special in the fictional worldview of Desai as it offers a male protagonist (Deven Sharma) caught up in the dynamics of existential conflict in the narrative. This adds another quality dimension in the greatness of the novelist as she makes it clear that her forte is not restricted to the exploration of feminine sensibility only. Rather, her narrative is an attempt to unravel the reality which transcends the much above the boundary of gender and highlights the truth of human existence. Trying to arrange an interview with Nur, Deven discovers the futility of seeking a idealized world. Nur is a representation of illusion for Deven. The world of Nur is sharply counter-pointed to the projected one by Deven. It is an atmosphere of garishness, crude ribaldry, blaring music, the cacophonous sounds of the by-lanes of Chandni Chowk resided by pimps and prostitutes. Nur is a "senile and debilitated man, presiding over a court of louts and lechers". Torn between the rival claims of two wives, he is reduced to non-entity in his own home and his identity remains under constant threat. This, in fact, indicates the gap between illusion and reality. Deven lives in the illusion that the Urdu poet should be like a God and his words must be poetry itself, but what he finds in reality is a filthy, vulgar person. Deven's coming to terms with reality is all the more difficult as "he does not want to tarnish this image (idealized image of Nur) because if it is damaged, Deven will be doomed. It will mean demise of Deven's glorified self. On his way back to Mirapore after his first visit to Nur, Deven reflects, "*Dawn and poetry .. all that was simply not true; it was humbug, hypocrisy and not to be trusted. If it were*

true then it would have stood the test of actual experience and it had not. Oh, it had not, it had not". The second visit further affirms the collapsing world of Nur as idealized by Deven. The poet's pathetic account of his circumstances with special reference to his second wife Imtiaz Begum's robbing him of his house, audience, and friends gives another blow to the world of illusions as projected by Deven. Desai gives an interesting account of the culmination of Deven's second visit and says "*he scrambled to his feet, and turned and fled"*.

During the third and last visit to Nur's place, Deven is prepared mentally to look at the things objectively. During this visit Deven transcends from hurling himself down the stairs to walking out with dignified deliberation into fresh air and sunlight. It symbolizes his transition from running away from reality which threatens his illusions to recognize the truth and consciously rejecting the idealized world of illusions. However, his assimilation of reality also foregrounds a challenging awareness of his own discrepancies and he reflects how he tried "*to search always for solace when there was other game to hunt in the forest. Had he had more spirit, more nerve, more desire and ambition, then perhaps he would have instead hunted for success, distinction, magic. Perhaps published a book himself, earned a name for himself, a little fame, even gold bangles for Sarla"*. He suffers from self-deprecation as he realizes how "*every effort he had made ended in defeat. Most of the poems he had written and sent to Murad had been rejected ... his wife and son eyed him with blatant disappointment, nor had he won the regard of his colleagues and students"*. His experience with Nur teaches him that the circumstantial fetters which he had yearned to escape were a part of life and hence inescapable at any level.

Thus we find Deven shedding his illusions towards the end of the narrative. Deven may be considered as one of the most self-actualized of Desai's characters who gradually moves towards personal maturity. Deven's initial sense of frustration of life is traceable to his escapist tendencies. He yearns incessantly for liberation

from his circumstantial reality which offers him problems of adjustment. The dichotomy between the real and the fantastic generates tension in the mind. But his final realization makes him understand that the kind of liberation he was aspiring was nothing more than a land of illusions. Coming to terms of understanding with reality may be challenging but is certainly of crucial significance. This kind of understanding helps Deven's transition from dependence to self-reliance and provides him the courage to own the circumstantial responsibility soulfully in order to find meaning in authentic life. This transformation in Deven can be identified with Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* where at the end of the novel Stephen also becomes a fully formed artist, and his diary entries reflect the independent individual he has become. Thus this takes the pattern of the novel of the personal formula as pointed out by Raymond Williams when he talks about how sum of experiences as extracted and how human individuals are created from the pattern.

The use of poetry in the narrative may also be referred with special reference to the contradictions of illusion and reality. The poetic world as structured in the narrative offers as a counter-point to the realistic world of bread and butter for a common layman. Deven feels that the world of Nur and his poetry with its entire connotative plethora was quite different than the one filled with ordinary blockades and frustrations which his everyday existence offers to him.

Deven's wife Sarla offers a counter-point to his illusionary world as she can see through by being mocking, disparaging, and scornful in her attitude for him: The contrast or distance between the husband, Deven and the wife, Sarla, is presented suggestively when he recollects that she was not his choice but, that of his mother and aunts who were crafty and virtuous. She is presented more through her gestures, rather than actions, and hence, represents the picture of an abandoned wife. The protagonists of Anita Desai suffer from lack of ability to communicate their ideas to the members of the family or to their life partners and the unsaid forces the reader to re-evaluate the

purpose of communication in an individual context throughout the book. Thus here Desai portrays a realistic picture of the bonds of marriage mirrored in Deven's complacent behaviour towards his wife.

Deven also proves to a professional failure as he fails to maintain a rapport with his students in his college. The motif of escapism as mirrored in his familial domain has a similarity in relation to his professional sphere. Instead of relating to the students in class, he ignores them by focusing his eyes "*upon the far end of the room, the door that opened on the passage, freedom and release*". Here a true picture of the educational system of the nation is painted where students with scientific backgrounds are meant for the luxuries of life whereas those with a knack for humanities are shown to rot in dingy classrooms. This fact is also revealed in the way in which Deven's Hindi students take technical classes outside in order to get employment, giving least importance to the learning of the subject within the college premises. This is a reflection of the fact that the art, culture, heritage and history of the country lies threatened in front of the emerging technological boom of the globe.

The novel presents a crucial relationship between Deven and Murad. Deven views him as the editor of a leading "Literary Urdu Journal" — a signifier for his desired illusionary world — hence a part of the world he longs for. Contrary to this, the idealized world of Murad exploits Deven by offering a tantalizing hope of escape into a different world. Murad's reference to the "glorious tradition of Urdu literature" and the "need to protect it in this era of—that vegetarian monster, Hindi" makes Deven "shrink back and shrivel in his chair for Hindi was what he taught". Here Anita Desai questions the meaning of friendship that stands on selfishness and insensitivity as observed by Deven's relationship with Murad.

Thus by exposing the psyche of the various characters Desai here clearly traces the pattern of a personal novel as defined by Raymond Williams where Desai paints a personalized picture of post colonial India to clarify and frame an individual portrait of Deven and Nur. It should be said to the credit of Desai that she has created for the first

time in Indian English fiction a figure like Nur, a poet born out of nervousness, impatience and regret, and a lecturer like Deven, who comes alive with his fragmented personality.

Desai's treatment of the questions related to the social role and implications of language forms the central thrust of the novel. Her motive becomes amply clear when she replies to a question related to the theme of the novel in the following words: *"I was trying to portray the world of Urdu poets. Living in Delhi I was always surrounded by the sound of Urdu poetry, which is mostly recited. Nobody reads it, but one goes to recitations. It was very much the voice of North India. But although there is such a reverence for Urdu poetry, the fact that most Muslims left India to go to Pakistan meant that most schools and Universities of Urdu were closed. So that it's a language I don't think is going to survive in India There are many Muslims and they do write in Urdu; but it has a kind of very artificial existence. People are not going to study Urdu in school and college anymore, so who are going to be their readers? Where is the audience?"*

Desai then also realistically exposes the false beliefs of the people who developed a highly romantic attitude towards poetry. The poets and writers no doubts play a significant role in the progress of a language but their romantic notions tend to play havoc with it. Instead of understanding the use value of language some of them tend to attach a romantic notion of false pride in being a poet or writer in a language and, like Nur, considers certain forms of behavior as essential. It is perhaps because of such an attitude towards poetry and language that Nur, in his senile old age, still lives with the aristocratic habits, feeding his pigeons, gulping rich food and gathering around him a group of admirers whom he supplied rich food and liquor. Treating themselves as the custodians of a language and by implication a culture or cultural group people like Nur indulge in glorifying their role. Even genuine attempts of persons like Deven are spurned by Nur simply because he fails to understand language freed from established views associating language with certain cultural groups or persons and artists like himself : *"Urdu*

poetry...How can there be an Urdu poetry when there is no Urdu language left? It is dead, finished...So, now you see its corpse lying here, waiting to be buried...Those Congress-wallahs have set up Hindi on the top as our ruler. You are its slave. Perhaps a spy even if you don't know it, sent to the universities to destroy whatever remains of Urdu, hunt it out and kill it...It seems you have been sent here to torment me, to show me, let me know to what depths Urdu has fallen. All right then, show me, and let me know the worst."

In the same way, Desai's presentation of man woman relationships in a patriarchal society reveals her concern and understanding of different forms of woman's experiences through an effective interplay of motive and the medium. The women in the book seem vicious, specially the enraged young wife of the poet Nur. Just as the male characters are entrapped in an unsuccessful world, the female characters feel frustrated within a patriarchal society that reduces them to clinging to these men who fail to provide them what they want. Deven's wife Sarla hates him and feels disgusted at his failures. All her dreams of a luxurious life are dashed to the ground because of his meager income. But the way she registers her protest is nothing more than a symbolic dissatisfaction with her lot. It may be because of the centuries of serfdom that runs through their blood that these women fail to rebel openly. *"Sarla never lifted her voice in his presence- countless generations of Hindu womanhood behind her stood in her way, preventing her from displaying open rebellion. Deven knew she would scream and abuse only when she was safely out of the way, preferably in the kitchen, her own domain. Her method of defence was to go into the bed room and snivel, refusing to speak at all, inciting their child to wail in sympathy."*

The novel incorporates language-confrontation, male- dominance and existential concerns of Desai. All these components are bound with the beauty of language which never fails to satisfy the aesthetic sense. Though there is an ultimate catastrophe waiting for Desai's protagonist, yet it is his will to struggle which makes him indefatigable, a traveler in the never

ending quest for identity and purpose in life. The interaction of the fictional concerns and their artistic presentation makes the novel an artistic whole and stands testimony to Anita Desai's maturity as a novelist.

Conclusion

Thus in this resonant and realistic novel *In Custody*, Anita Desai endeavours to link the readers' line of thought to the bilingual scene of Hindi versus Urdu before and after partition of India, as Urdu 'language of the court in the days of royalty – now languishes in the back lanes and gutters of the city. No place for it to live in the style to which it is accustomed, no emperors and Nawabs to act as its patrons'. The revelation of post colonialism and imperialism tracks a criss- cross of cultures, traditions, displacement, Diasporas, alienations and a consequential chain of illusions and disillusion. A parallel is drawn between fiction and history, between fiction and reality.

This mannerism of Deven is typical to Anita Desai's portrayal through which complex issues are presented in a realistic style. Anita Desai emphasizes on the individual's inner world of sensibility urges and conflicts. The characterization of Deven and Nur has the typicality of Anita Desai's implicit maneuver as usual.

Anita Desai who is best known for her studies of Indian life, has been successful in touching almost all the social evils prevailing in Indian society like alcoholism, poverty, superstitions, fight for religion, brain drain, domestic violence, exploitation of poor by the rich etc. Murad earns more but never pays Deven for his contributions as Murad is the son of a rich businessman and Deven of a poor widow. She has also portrayed the true picture of the plight of teachers, poets and the deprived ones struggling for name, fame and wealth. Desai has tried to bring up a new issue of problems of extinction of a language like Urdu after the partition of India and Pakistan. The novel is rich with material for multi-level reading and interpretation and touches on linguistic, political, and cultural issues, for example the counterpoints of home, family, and friendship, the metaphor of abandonment through the symbolism of trap, dust, heat, ironic reversals,

deception, etc.

Thus the novel is a portrait of human lives as it exists in their own exclusive circumstances, of the hypocrisy and pretension lying within the human spirit, of the difference between the town and the city life, of human helplessness and oppression on the road to one's aspirations. **Hence, quoting the words of Raymond Williams in *Custody* is 'a complex of personal, family and working relationships, and draws its whole strength from their interaction in an indivisible process.'**

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