

IN CUSTODY: A STUDY OF LITERARY WAVERING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE PROMINENT CHARACTERS OF THE NOVEL

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The novel *In Custody* is entirely different from other novels of Anita Desai. Desai is known for depicting mental picture and psychological upheavals of her characters. *In Custody*, the novel depicts action both at physical and mental levels. There are too much physical movements in the novel. The characters move from one place to another place quite frequently. The prominent characters depicted in the novel are imprisoned either by force or by their own will. Deven is in the custody of Nur. Nur is in the custody of his wife Imtiaz Bibi. Murad is in the custody of his Urdu magazine *Awaaz*. Imtiaz Bibi is in custody of her unethical ambition. Siddique is in custody of attaining his richness. The characters of the novel have surrendered their freedom. Deven was not interested to indulge himself in the task of taking interview of Nur. But his childhood friendship with Murad compelled him to accept this difficult task. He had his domestic engagements and academic activities to perform. Deven was not trapped by Murad but as a cunning businessman he used the name of Nur to tame Deven. Deven's opposition for this task became feeble. For Deven, Nur's name was enough to take him in custody. Deven was a great admirer of mighty Urdu poet Nur. Deven adored him like a living god. Secondly Deven was a lover of Urdu. He learnt Urdu from his father during his childhood in Lucknow. After the premature demise of his father, Deven was taken to Delhi by his mother. Only in Delhi he learnt Hindi.

.... his first language when he was a child in the half- forgotten, unsubstantial city of childhood, and which was still his first live. The glow was also caused by pride, of course, at being asked to contribute a piece by the editor of what he took to be a leading Urdu journal.

The novel comes to motion with Nur's consent to give the interview to Deven. Nur was the mighty Urdu poet. He broke the iron wall of domestic life and came into the custody of Nur. Murad persuaded Deven to visit Nur to take his interview.

'You go and see Nur', Murad continued. 'You know his work well-oh, as well as anyone, I suppose. You wrote a book about him once, didn't you?'...

'Look, will you do this feature for me or not?' 'Of Course I will, Murad.' He became meek.

The custody of Deven began with his approval to do the work with Murad for his Urdu magazine *Awaaz*. This custody was without an end. Deven met the living legend of Urdu poetry. The physical action began when Deven went to Delhi to take the interview of Nur. He undertook journey several times from Mirpore to Delhi. He visited Nur several times. Nur was a sensuous man. He loved the life of flesh and blood. Wine and woman became his weakness. He loved the life dominated by primitive instincts lying hidden in human unconsciousness. He was taken into the custody of his second wife Imtiaz Bibi. She was a dancer in brothel. She entered in the life of Nur and forced him to dance on her tunes and rhythms. He was under the custody of his mighty wife Imtiaz Bibi. This thing has been illustrated in the novel on several occasions. The poet Nur lacked his independent capacity to form his opinions. He was under the influence of his mighty wife. He was an intellectual slave under the custody of his wife. When Deven tried to establish the talent of the poet, his every move was frustrated by his cunning wife Imtiaz Bibi. Nur was also aware of it but did not dare to voice his opinion. The strong custody of his wife had compelled him to behave like a slave.

‘Bibi, my heart’, interrupted Nur, coming forward agitatedly, ‘I don’t know what your spies – ah, friends – have told you about Deven. I can tell you he is not trying to murder you, or me, or anyone –’ He broke into a nervous giggle, and felt silent under her contemptuous look.

The novel *In Custody* has taken the broader theme of personal identity and human existence. The novel has elucidated the theme of failed human aspiration, unethical ambition, lack of true spirit of friendship, run after money and desire for the satisfaction of sensuous pleasure. These lacunas exist in human flesh. The hot pursuit of Deven to take the interview of Nur compelled him to take the custody of Nur. He visited three times, to Nur’s place. In his first and last visit he was behaved very wildly and badly either by Nur or either of his wives. In his first visit Deven was humiliated both by Nur and his second wife Imtiaz Bibi. Every time Deven promised himself that he will never visit Nur’s place to take his interview. But he repeated the same mistakes. In fact, he was in emotional and intellectual custody of Nur. Deven lacked determination to tear the iron cage of emotional custody of Nur. During his first visit to Nur’s place Deven spent a sizeable time in Nur’s company. He even appreciated Deven’s good pronunciation in Urdu. But he had serious reservation against Deven’s subject Hindi and Hindi poets and novelists. He humiliated Deven before the gathering of the people in the evening mehfil. He tore down the respect of Deven. In fact, it was the deep love and respect of Deven for Nur and Urdu that he did not oppose the mighty poet. He was in the custody of Nur. He accepted the humiliation and accepted willingly the mighty custody of Nur. Nur had contempt against Hindi. He had a distaste for Hindi and to Deven’s Hindi teaching. The mighty poet behaved like uncivilized urchin. This was beyond expectation.

‘Forgotten your Urdu? Forgotten my verse? Perhaps it is better if you go back to your college and teach your students the stories of Prem Chand, the poems of Pant and Nirala. Safe simple safe comfortable ideas of cow worship and caste and romance of Krishna’

The humiliation did not end here. When Deven tried to assist intoxicated poet into his wife’s room, he was behaved very wildly by his wife. In a way, Imtiaz Bibi tried to prove Deven was responsible for the poet’s pathetic condition. It was the maiden visit of Deven. He was unaware of poet’s habit. The poet vomited on the floor of his wife’s room, He entered in his room and made the room dirty. His wife Imtiaz Bibi scolded him. When Deven tried to Nur she rebuked him very badly.

... All of you- you *followers* of his – you have reduced him to that, making him eat and drink like some animal, like a pig, laughing at your joke....’ Am I to stand for this in my room, in my house? Did he marry me to make me live in a pigsty with him?

When he reached Mirpore back to his home, Deven was a broken man. He also tried to forget the ugly incident that happened late night at Nur’s home as bad dream. He pledged never to visit his home. But his pledge evaporated when he was summoned by the poet to become his secretary. The second visit of Deven to Nur’s place was fruitful. Nur promised Deven to give him not only the interview but also his poetic creativity. Deven was quite satisfied with this meeting. He told all these things to Murad. Murad suggested him to buy a tape recorder to record the voice of Nur. Once again Murad showed his business caprice. He wanted to take maximum mileage from the voice of the poet Nur. He again ditched his friend Deven. Deven was more prone to take dictation. Murad wanted to make his Urdu magazine as a magazine of reputation. Nur became close to Deven during his second visit. He unfolded his personal life with his wife Imtiaz. Nur became the prey of Imtiaz because of his sensuous pleasure. He was the slave of the life of flesh and blood, which he derived from Imtiaz. In fact, he met Imtiaz in brothel. Nur was regular visitor of brothel and he became the slave of Imtiaz’s fertile body. She was a dancer and later became the second begum of Nur. Imtiaz compelled Nur to dance him on her rhythm as she controlled his life. Nur was in custody of Imtiaz Bibi. She behaved like a strict jailor. Nur was mentally tortured by his second begum. He accepted every pain inflicted on him. He had accepted his destiny meekly.

‘That is what she really wanted, you see. This house – my house – was the right setting – unlike her own house which was a house for dancers, you see – although she was quite famous...’ ‘But she was not content with that she wanted my house, my audience, my friends Nothing, I tell you, nothing. I am a beggar myself now, ...’

Imtiaz Bibi was in the custody of her over ambition. She did not only want to possess his physical wealth but also his elevated position. She aspired to establish herself as a poet in the place of her husband Nur. She had stolen the poems of Nur. She has forbidden her husband to recite his poems

before the audience in public. Nur was aware of his pathetic condition. He wanted to give his poetic treasures in the safe hands.

‘But if the right person – the right man – came, came, not Imtiaz Bibi, I won’t tell her,I’d have much to tell, yes’s he began to laugh softly into Deven’s face. ‘Much, much to tell’ , he chuckled.

Nur raised hope in the heart of Deven. He was ready to receive the treasure of Nur. But the situation changed dramatically. The day when Deven visited to Nur’s place was an important day, it was the birthday of Imtiaz Bibi but Nur left the place along with Deven from mehfil. Imtiaz was extremely furious because Nur had left the place. She scolded Nur. In the meantime, his first wife Safia Begum came and saved him from her wrath and diatribe. Nur was helpless. Deven left the place and came to Murad’s office. Later, Deven came back to his home Mirpore and engaged himself in the academic duties of the college. He talked with Abid Siddique his colleague concerning his meeting with Nur. Siddique mocked at him because Nur was the giant poet of Urdu literature. Later Siddique was convinced. He was instrumental in securing tape recorder from college authority. Deven visited Delhi to purchase the tape recorder. The deal was sealed between Murad and Jain Saheb without Deven’s knowledge. It was not a new but second-hand tape recorder. Deven disagreed to buy it but both Murad and Jain sahib persuaded him to accept this deal. Deven had no deep knowledge of electronic goods and he consented for the second-hand tape recorder.

Deven’s third visit to Nur’s place was full of melodrama. For the first time Deven observed Nur helpless, spineless, and without any intellectual determination. He was a man of mercurial temperament. In his previous visit he had promised Deven to give his interview but now he was afraid to talk on this issue inside his home. When Deven visited his home, he saw that the people had gathered in good numbers inside the courtyard of the house. Deven was well aware of every corner of Nur’s house. He climbed the stairs and waited outside the entrance of Nur’s chamber. Deven coughed and gave the indication of his presence to Nur. Nur recognized Deven’s voice and immediately summoned him inside his own chamber. Deven saw Nur. He noticed that the poet was emotionally disturbed. He was psychologically broken. He was dejected. The tears flowed from his eyes. Deven came to know from Nur that his wife became ill after the celebration of her birthday and performed program. Deven felt happy but he did not show his happiness on his face. He only suggested the poet that he should shift his wife in the hospital for better treatment. Nur informed Deven that she did not want to leave home.

‘She refused. She cries and weeps if they come to take her to the hospital, and then her temperature rises ... I begged them to leave her – I told them I would nurse her myself – and she wept in my arms –’

Nur was entirely under the emotional custody of his second wife Imtiaz Bibi. Imtiaz Bibi was his lifeline and heartbeat. He did not want to see Imtiaz's tears and accepted everything which she liked. Nur's love for Imtiaz Bibi was pure and undemanding. But Imtiaz never reciprocated her love in that way. Even during her illness, she had put her sharp eyes on the movement of Nur. She had employed several spies to watch the movement of Nur. Nur was aware of it. He was also in physical custody of Imtiaz Bibi. When Deven asked for interview, he became too much tensed. He wanted to give interview but he was forbidden by his wife Imtiaz to recite poems in public. He was also prohibited to give public interview. Deven was unaware of these things. In his previous visit Nur had spoken about his conjugal disharmony but Deven had never expected such kind of strict vigil and custody for the old and helpless poet.

Nur grimaced with horror. 'Shh, shhh', he hissed at Deven. 'Don't speak like that, we will be heard. I am forbidden. You don't understand. She is right – absolutely right – I only make a fool myself – an old man, my day is over - ... 'Who told you that? Deven cried in passion.... 'Don't shout! You are mad, you will be heard', the poet cried, ... 'You had better go ... don't talk to me about it many more', and he covered up his ears with his hands and refused to listen.

Nur had no right to express his thoughts. He lacked freedom of expression inside the four walls of his house. When Nur and Deven were busy in conversation, Nur's wife summoned him. She also summoned Deven. Deven had dared to challenge the custody of Nur to his wife. He had tried to take the interview of Nur inside his house much against the wish of Imtiaz Bibi. She ruthlessly behaved to Deven and almost spat at him though symbolically. Deven saw hatred and revenge in the eyes of Imtiaz Bibi. Nur tried to defend Deven but he himself was a prisoner in his own home and his wife was a ruthless jailor. She compared Deven with jackals.

'Jackals don't murder, she said coolly 'They wait for others to murder, because they haven't the courage. Then they come to feed on the flesh.' ... 'Still my eyes can see more clearly than yours. You', she said, spitting at Deven from between her very small, sharp teeth, 'you – tell me why you keep coming here. What are you here for?'

Nur defended unsuccessfully to Deven before Imtiaz Bibi. Deven was terror stricken. He left Nur's place immediately without looking at him. He climbed the stairs to come down. He came to the courtyard. He met an old woman there. He immediately recognized her. She was the first wife of Nur, Safia begum. She talked with Deven. She came to know that Deven had visited him to take Nur's interview but he was stopped by Imtiaz Bibi. After having a long walk with Deven she came to know that he wanted to take the interview of the poet desperately. She promised to help Deven but she showed her mercenary design. The lust for money dominated her behavior. She was in the custody of her own mercenary nature. She said that she would make the poet available for the interview, but only on one condition that if she is paid. She wanted to be paid according to her

own demand. Deven was astonished. If Imtiaz Bibi was over ambitious, Safia begum was mercenary. The spineless Nur hanged between the desires of his two greedy wives.

‘Listen’, she said, in a direct, uncouth mouth way that startled him. ‘You will not forget about the payment, will you?’

‘Payment?’ Deven stopped short. This was a new demand, an unexpected one for which he has made no provision.

Deven was psychologically broken and mentally upset to meet such a bizarre female characters at the residence of Nur. He decided to drop the project without proceeding further. He once again visited Siddique. Deven surrendered his respect at the feet of Siddique. Siddique changed his colors like chameleon when Deven informed the incident which he faced at Nur’s place and also told that his elder wife Safia begum demanded money for Nur’s interview. Fortunately, the money was made available by college authority to satisfy the urge of Nur’s wife. The interview began after facing a lot of ups and downs. Nur was the salve of sensuous nature. He was under the custody of his five senses. In his old age he married a dancer girl, who forced him to dance on her tunes and rhythms. He wanted rum, biryani, and kebab everyday from Deven during the period of his interview. Deven almost became bankrupt to feed the stomach of Nur. Deven was in the custody of Urdu and Urdu poet Nur. He wanted to establish Nur in the literary world of Urdu. Unfortunately, he did not get cooperation because of the irrational behavior of the people. Nur’s heavy appetite made Deven beggar.

To begin with, Nur has spoken only of drink and food... ‘I would like a good mutton biryani from Jama Masjid for my lunch ... ‘So, a bottle of rum you must get, Deven Bhai, if I am to eat your biryani – it cannot be washed down with anything less, not Khan Sahib’s biryani.

The whole affairs of interview became feasting and drinking. Nur delivered his academic discourse from time to time. The mission of recording of the voice of Nur became a heroic failure. The voice of Nur was recorded but it was not clearly audible. The voice was combined with noise and several irrelevant sounds. The whole scheme became a fiasco. The originality was lost somewhere. This thing was discovered only at the end of interview. Deven was unsuccessful in his attempt. He had a lot of debts. Deven went to Murad to secure his help but Murad put conditions to secure his help. Urad wanted to take the tape recorder in his custody which was the asset of the college. But he failed very badly. Deven did not surrender the right of tape recorder to him. He had to face financial loss beyond his own endurance. Nur had become heavily dependent on him for financial need. Deven did not get help from Siddique. He did not lend moral support to Deven. He was in the custody of his new status of richness. He was busy in counting the bricks of his destroyed villa. Deven and Nur now became inseparable from each other. If Deven was in the custody of Nur, Nur

was equally in the custody of Deven. Deven was well aware of Siddique's recently acquired richness.

He had imagined he was taking Nur's poetry into safe custody, and not realized that if was to be custodian of Nur's genius, then Nur would become his custodian and place him in custody too. This alliance could be considered an unendurable burden – or else a shining honor. Both demanded an equal strength.

The title of the novel revolves around the main theme of the novel. The prominent characters Nur, the poet, and the interviewer, Deven became inseparable because of the forced circumstances. They had serious compulsions to remain together and it was beyond remedy. Nur was in the custody of his wife and Deven was in the custody of Nur and Murad was in the custody of his Urdu magazine *Awaaz*. It was published by him. *In Custody* is very difficult to comprehend as every individual succumbed to the weakness of human aspirations which later culminates to put one's own identity and freedom in custody. The literary wavering of Nur destroyed Deven. In the novel his psychological sufferings and intellectual struggle made him tough. In his failure he remained heroic. Nur and Deven are complementary to each other. They are inseparable. The novel has taken the serious and big issue of struggle and survival of Urdu language.

References:

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