

Fantasy and Realism represented in the novel in custody

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ABSTRACT

As a young woman, Desai says she felt her own life was not big or broad enough to feed her writing. My whole life was about family and neighbors: it was very difficult for a woman to experience anything else. I was bored, and I needed to find more range, which is why I started to write about men in books like Baumgartner's Bombay [in which a German Jew flees the war in India] and In Custody [a college lecturer goes in search of a famous poet]. Men led lives of adventure, chance and risk. It just wasn't possible to write that from an Indian female perspective. Anita Desai refuses to be straight jacketed into any brand which includes the role of feminism. A feminine style is not to be confused with feminist that is associated with flowery style, trivial themes and a frivolous tone. Many contemporary women, writers have very prosaic style and masculine concerns. Majority of Indian women writers have stopped short, from a lack of imagination, courage, nerve, or gusto-of the satirical edge, the ironic tone, the inspired criticism or the lyric response that alone might have brought their novels to life. Her view on the skill of writing is better exemplified in the following quotation: Writing has become such a deeply ingrained habit. For her it is like chain smoking. She admits that she chain-smokes with words, with books. (Ralph, 94). Form and structure, in the novels of Anita Desai have taken the shape of an exquisitely designed tapestry (Ralph, 9). The novel of Desai revealed her unique world view, but at the same time conforms to the existing tendencies in modern fiction.

Key words: Fantasy, Realism, ingrained, tapestry, metropolis. Fantasy and Realism

INTRODUCTION

In everyday language, Fantasy refers to the workings of imagination but in different theoretical models it has more force. In psychoanalysis, fantasies are often compensatory of wish –fulfillment that allows the dreamer to cope with disappointment –and the dreamer may even convince him or herself that the fantasy is real. (Wolfreys and others: 33-34). Wolfreys and his comates define Realism as:

Realism is often associated with representing average experience-the lives of middle –class characters who do little that is unusual or exciting; it prefers an objective standpoint , and is illusionist in that it asks its readers to forget that they are reading fiction(2005:72)

Deven is the junior lecturer in Hindi is the realism whereas his love for Urdu language is the fantasy .Being inspired by Nur, he always loved Urdu poetry. He missed the chance of becoming Urdu lecturer. To fulfill his unsatisfied desire of becoming Urdu lecturer, he tries to cover an exclusive interview with the Urdu poet, Nur and so excited going to Delhi. He tries to liberate from pathetic life with an opportunity of having exclusive interview of famous Urdu poet, Nur Shahjehanabadi. When he visits the person Nur, he becomes totally disappointed seeing his lifestyle .However, these humiliating experiences bring about a sudden change in hero and he beings to look within to find his own strengths and to know his real self. Deven dream clashes with the realism of Nur. His dreams are totally crushed when he sees the old Nur surrounded by flattering crawlers, married to a younger calculating wife who wants to use his glory to win herself fame. He decides to save his name and works of Nur for posterity. So, he records his voice on tape for his small-town university. But for very badly, the interview and total recording of his memories end in a fiasco leaving his literary aspirations crushed.

In custody, Anita Desai depicts very impressively the conflict between fantasy and realism. The class situation forces the hero to enter into fantasies of sudden wealth, unexpected cheques, acceptance in the literary circles of the metropolis. But Deven was not young now that he depicts in,

Withered as the last leaf upon the tree, Shaken by the chill blast of winter (cus: 12)

Deven is frustrated Urdu poet, Urdu intellectual, husband and father who married the wife that was arranged and chosen by his family, Hindi lecturer because he does not really like Hindi lecturer and does it only for survival, adventurer who accepts to do something he had dreamed of for years but without understanding the obstacles he will have to negotiate. So he ends up completely at the mercy of others, subservient to others, the perfect victimized prey of all kinds of incompetent publisher, editor, high-teach dealer and technicians, a poet and his wives, a brothel Madame and her bouncer, etc. In other words he is in custody, i.e. in jail. But there is something worse in this situation. Deven is unable to set limits to other people and hence to protect him because he feels in charge of taking in custody what they represent. That is particularly true of the poet Nur. He becomes then the custodian of the poet, of this poetry and he does not realize that this positive side of the relation not only gives him a responsibility to take care of this poetry that is entrusted to him, but also makes him the exploited slave of the poet himself. By taking the poet's poetry in custody, becoming the poet's custodian he is at the same time taken in custody, i.e. jailed, trapped by the poet and his wives, the dealer and his helpers, the publisher and editor, even his own wife and son.

Anita Desai tries to explore the real world of village with all its genuine traits. She depicts the picture of village roads, temples, houses, wells and villagers very minutely. Here she wants to highlight the unchanged picture of the village. At the same time she accepts the necessary changes indirectly that may polish the village life. Desai points out the conflict between fantasy and realism by depicting the changed picture of the village killing the calm and healthy past life. Deven memorizes those days full of enjoyment at the background of industrial world. He also remembers the loss of treasure of friendships, entertainment, attractions and opportunities of his past life. The reference of Nur poet and his thought, *The first white hair on aman's head appearing like a white flower out of grave*. Indicates the fantasy avoiding the realism. The conflict between fantasy and realism highlighted very nicely in the following lines;

Life is no more than a funeral procession winding towards the grave, Its small joys the flowers of funeral wreaths..... (Custody: 26).

Deven moves in city in search of the poet's address. While moving, he was in various activities on the pavement and roads that disturbed him a lot. He sensed the feeling of gloomy prison in this atmosphere. This seems to be fantasy that Deven felt. He feels restless to inhale the sickly air. Into this dismal world, comes a ray of hope in the form of his childhood friend and companion, Murad. Murad, is the editor of a Urdu magazine that aims to publish long lost unpublished pieces of poems of high artistic value of the once famous, decrepit poet Nur Shahjehanabad. Deven being an Urdu lover leaps in joy as Murad gives him an opportunity to interview the poet, something that he had wished since the time he realized the penmanship of Urdu poets and novelists. 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. 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. The dialogues of the poet indicate the scene of the fantasy. Instead of welcoming the arrived person at his door, he calls:

Who is it that disturbs the sleep of the aged at this hour of the afternoon that is given to rest? It can only be a great fool. Fool, are you a fool? I have been dreaming of fools. I am surrounded by fools. Fools will follow me, peruse me and find me out and capture me so that in the end I myself will join their company. (cus:38-39).

Deven's sense of feeling of godly call for him indicates fantasy that forces him to forget the realism. The entry into the company of the poet, Deven senses the feeling of relief. Here he feels:

He casting away the meanness and dross of his past existence and steadily approaching a new and wondrously illuminated era (Cus: 40). We many observe the fantasy's overcoming on the realism. The poet's response to Deven reflects the fantasy as: *Urdu language is dead finished. Sonow you see its corpse lying here, waiting to be buried (Cus: 42).*

Deven enters into the dreamy world of this past. He used to remember his father and in early childhood whenever he felt sad or nostalgic in his life. Deven imagines that the poet, Nur may be surrounded by unwanted people. The lunch scene of Nur surprises him a lot as he eats a lot of unnecessary dishes for his age and situation. Here he reminds his hostel life where he used to eat and appreciate the disliked dishes.

Nur accepted the change of status of Urdu in comparison with Hindi. For that the suggests the following thought:
I tell you, we must get over this rolling of Urdu verses into little sugar pills for babies to suck. We need the roar of lions, or the boom of cannons, So that we can march upon these Hindi- Wallahs and make them run. Let them see the power of Urdu (cus: 53).

The poet, Nur critically comments the Hindi literature that includes safe comfortable ideas of cow worship and caste and the romance of Krishna. He adds further that the ordinary poem Written on bicycle will win the Sahitya Akademi award being judged wrongly only because it is written in Hindi language. There is no award for Urdu literature because Urdu is supposed to have died in 1947. Here, Nur comments the design and knowledge of products – poem. The fantasy is reflected in the dialogue of Nur when he accepts the growth of poet's son as:

What he is doing is immaterial. It is what he will grow up to do that I am interested in. The son of a poet must grow up to be a singer of songs (cus: 56).

Deven comments on the followers of the poet, Nur for their inhuman behavior who make him eat and drink like a pig. He points out that such type of food may not support him to work at this stage. Nur's wife attacks on her husband's followers for bringing him in a critical situation due to over eating and drinking wine. Here she utters her husband as:
Don't talk to me about ulcers. It was drink; it was your party, your friends, your horrible, inferior life. (Cus: 61). When Deven points her out that he is ill and don't speak horrible words to him, she says: *Ill? He is foolish to spend time with you, to have friends like you, to ignore his wife and child (cus: 61).*

Here, Deven observed the real life of a poet. They devote their time for creative work and enjoying parties and neglect their family life. The life of literary men is caught in realism and fantasy. Outside the house they receive the respect but fail to get the same from their house. The normal life of household of the literary man is seen disturbed as they run after the world –wide fame. Deven feels very nervous at this scene and runs out being failed to connect the realism and fantasy observed in the life of the poet, Nur. He is found in the problem to evaluate the realism and the fantasy in the life of the literary men like Nur.

Desai's **In Custody**, depicts Sarla,(Deven's wife) Who is from city where she observed many advertises inspiring her to aspire so many luxuries such as a telephone, a refrigerator and even a car after marriage .But her dreams remain the dreams as her husband failed to fulfill them in reality . It indicates their wrong match in following words:

By marrying into the academic profession and moving to a small town outside the capital, none of these dreams had materialized, and she was naturally embittered (cus: 68).

Like her husband, she had been defeated and was a victim of the situation. At least Deven had his poetry; but she had nothing and so there was an added accusation and bitterness in her look. Deven asks his son to walk him telling the stories of his schools. He experiences the peace of mind, contentment even with sorrowful situation of the real life. Manu, Deven's son feels the difference between walking with mother (only to market and friend's house) and the father (rather adventurous).

Deven's remembrance of his dead father who got experiences with his mother traps him into fantasy and realism. He used to apologize to his wife as: *Wife had accepted more from a husband and felt grievously disappointed at the little he had made of his life (cus: 73).*

Deven has barely understood that situation but tried to be caught in fantasy and truth again and again. He was brought into complex by his friend, Murad by motivating him to become a secretary of Nur. Here Deven fails to decide whether to resign the realism and go into the search of bright future career. Nur comments his wife's ambition to become was his listener; secretary was a fantasy as the reality was something different. She rejects her past-dancer's life at the cost of a new aim that of Nur's house, his audience and friends. Here he states:

She was not content with that, she wanted my house, my audience, and my friends. She raided my house, stole my jewels- those are what she wears now as she sits before an audience, showing them off as her own (cus: 87).

Deven accepts the advice of Murad to record the recitation of Nur's poems but discloses the reality in following words:
From where will I get such things? I don't have one. I have never use done. I have not even managed to buy a radio yet for my family (cus: 92).

Deven's department friend, Siddiqui comments Deven's idea of becoming a biographer of Nur. He does not believe it as it seems to be untrustworthy. He comments further that Deven becomes the victim of the fantasy. Deven also feels comfortable to enter into dreamy world believing it as the reality. He tries to reject his dusty and disliked world for the joy of new happy world. Here the author points out his situation as:

These college grounds, these fields of dust, these fences of rusted barbed wire, these groups of hostile and mocking young students at the gate and the bus stop. All would be left behind, and he would be left behind, and he would move on into the world of poetry and art (cus: 105-6).

Deven enters into dreamy world frequently and feels satisfied imaging it a real life. His first meeting takes into different way of thinking. Here he imagines that Nur is his child and as a father he is embraces his very lovingly. Here the author points out that he wants to go very close to Nur to make a new career.

Deven is brought into tense mood by many events-Nur recording, problem of tape recorded, Students warning for marks, Murad's Deceitful nature and Nur's final two letters. Here he prefers to enter into his safe and secure past hoping:

He hoped his former life of non-events, non-happenings, would be resumed, empty and hopeless, safe and endurable. (Cus: 183).

There is some fresh intuition in Deven which propels him to move beyond his earlier pattern of life. "Consciousness still had its fine twisted hooks in his flesh and gave another and another tug"(132).

There is steady shift from a sense of self-devaluation and his degrading view of himself as an Animal in the cage to a growing confidence in himself as an independent entity. He comes to reach an understanding that there is always one freedom which cannot be denied to anyone which is a freedom to choose speaking in existentialist parlance:

Between his boyish expectations and Nur's grim reality he discovers a new lease of life, dignity, and the way of fulfillment of his dreams (Singh, Anita 149).

Deven comes closer to the recognition of truth when he feels that it was only in drearily dredging Through "this turbid, churned up ocean" (161) that some treasure could be netted offering a more Realistic perspective of looking for something worthwhile within the existing scheme of things: *The misleading egoistic propulsions are assimilated in the substantial and more concrete demands of life (Parmar 167).*

It now leads to the achievement of meaningful direction in life. Deven's choice of Committing himself to the task of becoming the custodian of Nur's poetry is a crucial point towards the end of the novel. It emanates from a gradual awareness of the need to provide meaning in life. Deven returns to Mirpore are a changed person and travel and distance are important aspects here:

In Desai's novels, the distance travelled in external time or space is extremely limited, but the distance travelled in terms of emotional experiences, revaluations, placing and replacing of ties leaves one with a feeling of having experienced both loss and gain very much like the ordeal of Prometheus (Jain, Stairs 303).

He is no longer irritated by Sarla's accusing look or the shabbiness of the clothes or the sight of other labor.

CONCLUSION

In Custody reveals a man who understands the trauma of his wife" (Singh, Sunaina 124) and he accepts this as "part of his own humiliation" (193). He gives up past constructs and opts for striving to find meaning in life. Walking along the canal in the early hours of the morning, he ruminates that if he could establish a bond with Nur and his poetry, "it would give him a reason and strength to survive whatever came" (203). This wish is no longer an escapist one in intent as he realizes that the alliance entails responsibility and courage to face problems. It reflects maturity and a break with illusions brightens the prospect of achieving a direction in the real world by instilling a unique optimism. Deven possesses an orientation towards growth and a relative flexibility of attitude and this helps him in correcting his distorted perspective and accepting reality. His personal growth involves in itself the awareness and the acceptance of the limitations of human existence and finding means to achieve fulfillment within them. Deven moves from self-deception to self-perception and achieves a sense of maturity and integration. He comes to know that peace is not found

in the external conditions, but within oneself, and the finding of tranquility within oneself is possible only when one lives a life of self-conscious awareness of one's being, an awareness that stimulates the growth of inner resources and inner strength. Deven is a typical manifestation of dualistic monism as he is able to see reality as a unified whole asserting that this whole essentially expresses itself in dualistic terms. He is able to understand that the essential unity is that of complementary polarities which co-substantial is in transcendent sense. The journey of Deven is about the search and research of his own identity with regard to the exploration of meaning of his identity.

The setting of the novel is important with regard to the latent meaning of the narrative which foregrounds the "mode of self-realization" for the main protagonist of the novel.

Trying to arrange an interview with Nur — the poet — he discovers the futility of seeking a perfect/idealized world: "*Fantasy lays in the narrative which combines the realistic and the romantic modes*" (Jain, "In Pursuit" 53).

We find him shedding his illusions towards the end of the narrative to Deven gets up early, being disturbed by devotee's procession and dog's howling. When he walks out, he dreams that one of his nervous students will come and hit him. He walks a long distance expecting to stretch the night endlessly. He feels happy to be in dreamy night as day may bring with it the board meeting, an inquiry, an interrogation, exposure and blame. He accepts to remain in illusion being safe and secure from the dreadful reality. He imagines that the college authority will dismiss him for his misuse of college funds. Here he also sees the total ruin of his family, and selling all to clear his debts. Here he accepts the student with a knife as a simple solution over his all problems but in reality there was no release or escape (cus: 202).

Deven imagines that he was taking Nur's poetry into safe custody and he himself a custodian of Nur's genius. Again he himself a custodian of Nur's genius. Again he realizes that Nur would become his custodian and place him in custody. Here I observe that Deven draws two different meanings of it-unendurable burden or a shining honor (cus: 203). Deven again enters into dreamy world and imagines the death of Nur and oncoming responsibilities—bill of funeral, support the widows, raise his son, and finally a custodian of Nur's very soul and spirit. This thinking clashes with the reality with its calamities and problems. Deven is fought to be caught into the conflict of fantasy and realism. The novel ends with the thought that is with of unanswered questions of Deven (cus: 204).

In custody is a touching story of the central figures Deven and Nur. It is about the happenings of a small town professor while he goes to North India. Unexpectedly, his friend, Murad invites him to go to Delhi to interview the greatest living Urdu poet; Deven sees a chance both to achieve fame and to fulfill his dreams. It is far too late to turn back when Deven realizes that his dream is turning into a disaster. The ups and down of human mind is illustrated in a beautiful way. The hero's dream project of interviewing his dream man ends up in disaster and he remains deserted at the end of the story. Towards the end of the novel, when everyone deserts him, Deven suddenly finds his own strengths and learns to accept his responsibilities with fortitude. Two different settings, Mirope and Delhi and his shuttle between them teaches him to come out of his illusions, fantasies and to face the reality collecting his inner reserve of strengths. In the end, the realization of having accepted the gift of Nur's poetry, Deven becomes the custodian of Nur's very soul and spirit. Vinay kripal states that this realization is indicative of his growth as a human being. (1986:127-38).

The sunlight dissolving the darkness of the night before is symbolic of the emergence of the new courageous "self" of Deven dispersing his previous timid, vulnerable self. Mani points out the struggle of Deven being trapped in fantasy and realism in following words.

Deven fantasy about poet is shattered when he realizes that Nur was as trapped as Deven was that in fact Nur's cage was more prominent. Deven is now forced to accept Nur's life as another facet of reality (1998:25).

Deven's efforts to interview Nur are ultimately —after many misadventures that may be supposed to be funny —fruitless. Nur himself turns out to be a broken, querulous old man, and Deven is the same whining weakling at the end of the book that he was in the beginning. Talking about character sketching Anita Desai, Asunani states:

The characters of Anita Desai come alive in their dynamic process, always growing and changing, viable and mutable. They have been represented in retrospect and fall back upon memory, or the uncontrolled flow of thought. With this use of pure memory and flux, Desai maybe said to be depicting reality (1997:86).

Here, two central figures, Deven and Nur seem to be fit in the character sketching skill.

Deven is depicted as a representative of human being always being caught in the difficulties and difficulties only.



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