SELF-ALIENATION IN ANITA DESAI’S “IN CUSTODY”

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ABSTRACT

In Custody presents a young man Deven, psychologically edgy and longing to indulge in some literary enterprise. It is a touching account of the happenings in the life of a small-town lecturer, Deven in Hindi and his dream project of interviewing his idol and how it ends up in disaster. Here in the novel Anita Desai has experimented with the theme of alienation with a new set of characters and situations. The theme of alienation is emphasized herein with great skill. It draws our attention to the mental agony and dilemma of Deven, whose extreme love of Urdu forces him into the clasp of his supposed friend Murad. Desai’s sensitive portrayal and understanding of essential human nature makes the narrative conspicuous and captivating. The ups and downs of human life, the upheavals in relationships have been deftly crafted in this novel. It is the novel of shattered emotions and scattered dreams.

(Key Words: Dilemma, Consumerism, Existentialist, Comradeship…)

INTRODUCTION

In Custody dramatizes the critical moments of Deven, the protagonist. His helplessness, his suffering and nobility are described in terms of self-realisation. The women characters are few; they lack depth of introspection. The harsh realities of life produce in Sarla, Deven’s wife, a sense of frustration and resentment. She, like Deven, is also a victim, but her appearance is restricted. Deven is thrown into pits of disaster due to his infatuation for Urdu poetry. The dream of contributing articles on Nur to his friend Murad’s literary magazine turns out to be a nightmare. Nur, the idol and sustaining force of Deven, is discovered to be a dissolute old man absorbed in wine and wife. The art and the artist confront to bring humiliation to Deven, who is assaulted by the figures “scrambling out of the dark and defacing” verse. There is no “closeness of spirit,” no comradeship between the two. The fact is that in the act of inheriting his poetry, Deven becomes the keeper of Nur’s very psyche and spirit. Towards the end of the novel the hour of daybreak agree the dawn of existentialist awareness in Deven. He becomes aware of the true nature of his predicament. He resolves to secluded place for game of the legacy of Nur and gains courage to fight against the great misfortune, coming to him.
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Deven has only a poor, vulnerable mother, and he obviously grows into a pathetic, indecisive human being. He is not contented with his life and as a result, he becomes a victim of melancholy and lowliness. He recalls the bitter distress of his mother and the remorseful smile of his father for his failure in measuring up to her expectations. These familial and social factors clearly produced in him a compliant tendency to remain isolated. His estrangement from his wife Sarla and his only child Manu forces him to retreat into the fantasy world that Urdu poetry offers.

Deven’s sense of dullness, isolation and hostility is brought out through his approach towards his students and the surroundings of Mirpore. He is given the job of interviewing a prominent Urdu litterateur Nur Shahjehanabadi, but is unable to succeed there as well. He feels completely helpless. Deven’s venture in the field of poetry may be examined as a quest for meaningful existence. The real tragedy of alienation lies in his failure and frustration in reaching his noble ambition. Deven feels lonely. He feels that he is not being helped by Mr. Siddiqui, Murad, Nur and his wife. He is being victimized by these people to have their ends meet. Nobody seems to offer him any relief or support at this critical moment of his life.

In fact, no one was going to come forward with assistance. He would have to mend matters himself or be thrown out of college for false display of emotions, misappropriation of funds, fraud, cheating and lack of ability. Deven received this alienation from his own roots and culture. The estrangement is not complete but Deven feels alienated from his own job, his own family, and his own environment. His vision of life and art drawn from Westernized system of education is in disagreement with the day to day life. Anita Desai describe very beautifully the inner conflict of Deven who eventually finds the truth that life is not a bed of roses but consists of harsh reality of thorns as well.

Deven’s alienation is an outcome of opposing tendencies like Western education and cultural roots. He feels alienated because he is hassled by growing consumerism where money is everything. As a result he becomes utterly miserable and desperate. The sense of isolation and self-exile often clutches Deven’s psyche. He feels alienated not only from his immediate environment but also within himself. Life becomes a burden for him. Deven’s sense of isolation has two noteworthy undertones. He wants to break the custody by interviewing the great Urdu poet, Nur. He wants to break away from his marginality. At the same time, he feels ill equipped and incapable of adjusting himself to the emerging intricacies of life and society. He is dissatisfied and longs for what is not. He feels ensnared in its toughness and obstinacy. He now seeks to assess his existence and its problems.

Through the estranged figure of Deven, Anita Desai presents before us in the novel ‘In Custody’ the pragmatic picture of the changing socio-economic Indian scene and its impact on educated Indians who feel lonely, disinterested, and alienated owing to materialism, consumerism and industrialism. Like other protagonists of Anita Desai, Deven Sharma, is brought up to be hesitant, docile and quiet against exploitation. However he is highly sensitive and is desperate to find an outlet to his twinges. Ultimately, he finds solace after discovering his identity and work in this alliance. In contrast to Desai’s earlier novels, this novel has a positive ending.
CONCLUSION

Thus, Desai’s world of fiction including ‘In Custody’ in the centrality of self is concentrated in terrorizing isolation, finding it hard to reconcile with the world around ‘Self’. Her protagonists, like Deven are constantly faced with the stupendous task of defining their relation to themselves. They are unaware of the acceptable behavioral pattern. Her central characters, in general, have weird childhood from which they develop a negative self-image and hatred. The immediate result is their split psyche to view world as a hostile place. For them the domestic life is not their world, rather, it is a trap where their individuality is dying out. Thus complete lack of interest and discord in their relationship bring solitary confinements and show their unwillingness to face reality.

WORKS CITED