



HUMAN COMPLEXITY IN ANITA DESAI'S NOVEL *IN CUSTODY*

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ABSTRACT

Emotions play an integral part of human life. They are the powerful forces which determine one's outlook on life based on occurrences. There are six universal emotions that all humans can experience. These emotional responses include Happiness, Sadness, Fear, Disgust, Anger, and Surprise. Emotions are automatic, subconscious responses to stimuli, and feelings are the conscious experiences and interpretations of those emotions. Feelings are the complex and ever present forces in the life of an individual. They are the complexity of human emotions. The present research paper aims to explore Anita Desai's novel, *In Custody* in the light of human emotions. Timidity is displayed as the primal human emotion in the novel. Anita Desai is one of the most notable Indian writers in English. She, like James Joyce and Virginia Woolf is widely recognized as the pioneer of psychological novelist in Indian English literature. She penetrates deep into the interior or inner mind of her main characters instead of just focusing on the outer view.

Keywords: emotions, human complexity, feelings, human emotions, timidity.

INTRODUCTION

Emotions are the colourful threads that weave the intricate tapestry of human existence. They are the inner landscapes of human souls, the silent orchestration of thoughts, and the visceral reactions that make people undeniably human. There are six universal emotions that all humans can experience. These emotional responses

include happiness, sadness, fear, disgust, anger, and surprise. Emotions are automatic, subconscious responses to stimuli, and feelings are the conscious experiences and interpretations of those emotions. Feelings are the complexity of human emotions. They are profoundly individual traits or characteristics which

influence the behaviour of all humans and shape their relationship with other people.

Feelings are the complex and ever present forces in the life of an individual. Feelings originate in the neocortical region of the brain and they are the reactions to the emotional stimulus. Feelings form, when the human brain assigns meaning to the emotional experience. Feelings are something that one interprets their emotions and let them sink in. They are the subtle vibrations of joy, the turbulent waves of sorrow, and the electric sparks of love that course through the veins of human beings. They are the compass by which one can navigate the labyrinth of life. From the moment of one's first breath to final sigh, feelings shape the experiences and actions of human beings. In understanding and embracing of the feelings, humans can unlock the door to greater self-awareness and more profound connection with their fellow travellers on this remarkable journey called life.

Timidity in the novel *In custody*

Timidity is a primal human emotion. It is the state or quality of lacking in self-assurance, courage, or bravery. It has evolved to protect us from danger. It can manifest as a gut-wrenching dread, a racing heart, or a surge of adrenaline. It can also become overwhelming and paralyzing when it takes root in human

minds. Facing or trying to overcome timidity by understanding its origins, and learning to manage it is a courageous step towards personal growth.

In Custody by Anita Desai exposes the character of Devan, the protagonist of the novel in psychic balance and wholeness. Deven is a temporary lecturer in Hindi in a private College in Mirpore, a suburb in Delhi. He is very much interested in Urdu literature. As the novel opens, Murad, the editor of an Urdu magazine requests Deven to interview Nur Shahjehanbad. The rest of narrative changes between Deven's success and failure, his enthusiasm, hesitancy and then his landing into the final triumph. At the end, he finds power in his inner self and restores to face life as it comes to him. All through the novel socio-economic factors colour his personality and makes his psyche confused.

The novel *In Custody* emphasizes how trapped the protagonist feel and speaks due to his lack of social mobility. Deven feels trapped in his job and marriage and feels eternally defined by his social status. It exposes his entrapment in a mundane life, his obligations to family and profession and his futile attempts to preserve the remnants of Urdu poetry through his interactions with the poet Nur. Timidity leaves a trail of untaken

opportunities and loneliness due to the lack of socializing with others. It is just as real and scary as a monster. The novelist beautifully presents the internal conflict in Devan's mind and how he manages to overcome his timid nature and rises as a man of dignity.

The prime characteristics of Deven are his helplessness, humility, suffering and nobility. Socio-economic factors colour his personality and mould his psyche. The son of a debilitated, asthmatic school- teacher, Deven belongs to a lower middle-class family. As a child, he has watched closely the bitter disappointments of his mother and the apologetic smile of his father for his failure in measuring up to her expectations. Obviously, these familial and social factors generate into him the powerful compliant tendencies. Murad, a childhood friend and the owner of literary magazine *Awaaz* is free and frank to converse in Deven's college even though it is an alien atmosphere and at the same time he is only a casual visitor there. Deven, who belongs to this surrounding appears subdued and inferior by contrast. He becomes conscious and nervous while talking to Murad: He tried to wriggle out of Murad's grasp Unobtrusively so as not to offend him (IC 9)

He feels embarrassed and cannot tolerate his students staring at him. The

forces working in him side by side show his tendency to subordinate himself to the wishes of others. A conflicting situation arises when he has to meet the demands of his obligations. On the one hand, he should guard his image of a sober teacher: On the other, he should measure up to his friendship. He cannot annoy Murad because it would jeopardise his need for love and affection. But he feels guilty when his students watch him with Murad, in an exuberant mood. His idealized image of himself is that of an upright teacher in the college, a humble man in society outside and a victimized self in his home, turning aggressive often.

On the familial front, Deven find himself as an angry self. The repressive atmosphere of a lower-middle- class ethos offers him no suitable avenues of recognition. Deven is a gifted young man whose imagination has been fired by the glories of the Urdu poetry. The harsh realities of life produce in him intense feelings of frustration and resentment and force him to adopt different solutions to cope with his difficulties. Deven is aware of his personal incompetency, that he is incapable of fulfilling his wife's desires and dreams on the material level. Like his father, he feels apologetic because he cannot do better. This helplessness prevails in his attitude towards his life in

general and his family in particular. He lives with a sense of defeat and failure.

Deven feels inferior and contemptible not only due to Sarla's attitude but also owing to his diffused sense of failure. Overtly, his irritability and anger with Sarla appear to be the outcome of his hurt male ego. Deep down, his rage is, in a way, an externalization of self-hate, born out of an unconscious self-accusation. He reproaches himself for his inadequacy to make his distinction in life, "all they could measure up to was this – this shabby house' Its dirty corners, its wretchedness and lovelessness" (IC 67) what he had secretly dreamt of was "The world of drama and revolving lights And feasts and furies" (IC 67).

Something like Nur's world. The impossibility of transferring his dream into reality frustrates him. In society, with friends, he cannot revolt. It is basically alien to his compliant nature. At home, he imposes his superiority, turning aggressive, and intimidating Sarla. His rebellion consists of getting furious with her, flinging dishes, tearing shirts and expressing his rage in countless minor actions. He protests against Sarla's disappointment,

Deven decides to abandon the idea of having to continue the interview. This

decision has reasons first, the sordid aspect of Nur's personal life is too unpalatable for him. Second, forsaking the project is a face-saving device which cannot suits his temperament. The ambivalence in Deven's thoughts and actions deserve attention. On the one hand, he decides not to involve himself any further with this affair; on the other hand his love and admiration for Nur makes him move forward, In revolving against Sarla's dreams, he tries to ward off the on slaughter of his self –contempt.

The externalization of his self-accusation helps Deven in relieving his inner tension to some extent. Outside his home, he adopts self-minimizing as a protective measure. He tries to extricate sympathy from Murad by being apologetic and humble. He has an ambition to get his monograph published and to reach a height in the literary field, but he has not a pushing personality. He often has nightmares in which he sees himself struggling to reach some destination. His difficulty arises because he lacks self-confidence, he needs a prop to good him and to support him, luckily for him, help comes readily from Mund, Siddiqui, Nur's first wife and his own students. He looks up to them helplessly for encouragement and support, and feels relieved when his burden is shared. Self-pity weakens him further.

The ambitious part of his temperament demands that the interview should be perfect but, the self-defeating side makes him nervous, so much so that he thinks in terms of abandoning it. He maintains the capacity to hear the inner signals, and saves himself from cognitive losses and diminutions of humanness.

A sense of discomfiture hangs about him persistently. He is assailed by doubts that he can't to every new venture. When Murad chides him for such trepidations, he gains a semblance of confidence and struggles to make some head way in the project. His timidity and inefficacy go to such an extent that Deven cannot even buy a tape-recorder, leave alone operating it. He lets himself be deceived in the deal. It suits him to have someone to depend upon: Murad is there for bargaining, Chiku comes handy to operate the machine. This is mental lethargy. It shows that Deven has lost his capacity to defend his self-interest.

The broken tape recorder represents the way that modern life and technology fail to live up to their promise in India. After Nur agrees to let Deven interview him and record some of his unpublished work, Murad persuades Deven that technology is the future, and it would be far easier to tape-record the

poems (and transcribe them later) than take dictation by hand. Siddiqui and Mr. Rai persuade the college librarian to purchase the recorder as a way to promote "audio-visual methods of teaching." (The novel is set in the early 1980s; such recording technology was not a common research tool in India.) Murad takes Deven to Mr. Jain's electronics shop, where Murad and Mr. Jain dupe him into taking an old, secondhand Japanese tape recorder. Deven knows that he's being manipulated but feels that he has no option, so he goes along with it and even agrees to hire Mr. Jain's surly nephew Chiku to operate the tape recorder. Surely enough, the machine doesn't work. After several weeks of recording sessions, the tapes are full of background noise, honking sounds, and occasional drink orders—but almost no poetry. The recorder's failure dooms Deven's project, leaving him with just one usable poem: the one Nur wrote down by hand in his notebook. Deven worries that the college will accuse him of misusing its funds and fire him. Thus, Deven's attempt to preserve traditional knowledge through modern technology backfires, on another level, the recorder's failure is a warning against placing too much faith in new, modern, foreign technologies when traditional methods still work perfectly well.

The original strength of the real self which, though lost temporarily, can be found and refurbished to spontaneous growth. This is wrought not by any sudden or magic change in the psyche but by self-realization. The diminutive process is reversible and if one, at any stage, recovers the ability to recognize the inner signals, one can regain the real self. For Deven, this moment comes with the realization that he has to find his own strength and not depend on others.

He feels like a trapped animal. Marriage, family and even his friendship with Nur appear to him a cage. He is ensnared by his own illusions of the pseudo self. Deven then explores his own potentialities that he can stand all by himself. His strength lies within not without. This discovery is an inner directive guiding him to take cue from within.

His self-discovery at the final moment of crises is not abrupt, nor is it impossible, although it appears to be sudden. The foregoing discussion reveals his highly compliant basic nature. The novelist portrays him timid and lacking in dynamism. But, Deven is not one of those self-alienated individuals who lose the capacity to feel, strive and cope with life; who yearn to express themselves but find their voices dry. There is no doubt that

Deven has his share of intense conflicts. One can get out of this situation with the help of self-awareness and self-analysis. Deven emerges out of his epiphanic moments. He regains his ability to take decision and shoulder his responsibility. Taking decision and accepting responsibility are the distinctive forms of consciousness in these individuals who are moving towards self-realization, integration and maturity for a brief moment. After this, Deven undergoes a semblance of peak experience. Sitting on the empty bench, he loses his self-consciousness and forgets his surroundings. His pain of having been betrayed. Artistic works are not the chronicles of social reality but they transcend it to project the realm of future possibilities.

His quest ends in value-discovery. Facts of life and the premium placed on value, fuse together in his thoughts and this helps him come out of his depression. He does not attain this pre-vision of glory all of a sudden. There is an oscillation, at times he goes back to his mood of anxiety and despondence. He wishes to make amends for his humiliating behaviour with his wife but feels too proud to let loose his hold on her. Perfections in art and imperfections of human nature, illusion and reality, all stand clearly illuminated in

his mind like the morning glory after a sleepless night. After this aesthetic experience, his self-consciousness is transformed into spontaneity. He subscribes to the Hegelian view that the realm of fine arts is the domain of absolute spirit.

This aesthetic experience has a great cathartic influence on him. Psychotherapists believe that if one is able to relate himself to the world directly, experientially, with his senses alive, he can overcome his isolation and anxiety. Identified, thus, with the historicity of life, he builds a communion of consciousness with Nur and reaches out for an experience of human solidarity and inter-dependence. His friendship with Nur turns into a pure unimaginable relationship.

Summing up, Deven's transformation is highlighted through the medium of an aesthetic experience. Deven's temporal experiences are exchanged for the calm of eternal form. He reaches a wholeness of self, achieves the spontaneity when he marches away from a self-created trap to the joyous affirmation of life which is a pre-condition of positive freedom.

In the character of Deven, Anita Desai studies at once a timid and ineffectual but growth-oriented person who shows self-confidence, clarity of

vision and equilibrium. She manages to balance the self-alienating forces with actualizing qualities and offers a convincing portrait. The hero displays some healthy attributes. Though, throughout the novel, he is a dull and pale personality and is tossed by self-effacing drives, all his feebleness is submerged at the crucial moment of self-scrutiny. His awakening typifies coherence and completeness.

He has not achieved any metahuman qualities nor has he transcended ordinary humanness. He has simply risen above the ordinary differences and has gained the attitude of recognition of the essential solidarity and mutuality of human beings. As the novel's rhetoric suggests, the new Deven at the end is not an illusion but a reality. This is also represented symbolically when, while rushing home wards, Deven stops only to pull a thorn from his foot. It is a significant act implying his decision to overcome obstacles in life and march towards a higher goal.

He transcends his personal problems and gains an awareness of the existential problem of man. He accepts the human condition as it is and reaches an existential dimension of personality. The novel highlights how human foibles mar

the happiness of human life. The novelist has executed human emotions with a fine blending of humour, satire and irony.

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