

# Female voices in Anita Desai's In Custody

R.P. Kamalisree<sup>1\*</sup>

## Abstract

Anita Desai is one of the best known women writers of Indian fiction in English and she is a feminist writer who portrays women's desire and struggle for freedom from the social and traditional bondages in the patriarchal society in her novels. She deals with the major themes of her work focusing on isolation, lack of communication, inner struggle, man–woman relationship, and marital discord. This study aims to trace gender equality. Anita Desai has been a strong voice in portraying Indian woman's life, their struggles against male dominated society. Desai's *In Custody* is about searching for identity and meaning in life. The male characters in *In Custody* are trapped in unsuccessful lives. Anita Desai paints a picture of the status of women in her novels, which is most emphatically represented in her novel *In Custody*. This pitiful state of women in Indian society is a parameter that almost all women have to live every day.

## Keywords

Domination, Feminism, Self-identity, Trap custody.

<sup>1</sup>Nehru Memorial college, Puthanampatti, Trichy - 621007

## 1. Introduction

Anita Desai original name is Anita Mazumdar. She was born on 24 June 1937 and she is an Indian novelist and Emerita John E. Burchard professor of humanities at the Massachusetts institute of technology. As a writer she has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize three times. She is a prominent Indian novelist and short story writer. She is known for her sensitive portrayal of the inner feelings of her characters many of whom are women facing difficult personal situations.

Anita Desai, an acclaimed Indian novelist, received her education at Queen Mary's higher secondary school in Delhi and later graduated in English literature from the University of Delhi in 1957. Her education played a significant role in shaping her literary career. She has a distinguished literary career, marked by numerous awards and accolades. She is known for her insightful exploration of human relationships and the intricacies of Indian Society.

Some of her novels include *Clear Light of the day*, *In Custody*, and *Fire on the mountain*. Desai has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize multiple times and has received several literary honors for her contributions to contemporary Indian literature. Anita Desai's literary career spans several decades primarily from the 1960's to the early 2000's. She gained prominence during the latter half of the 20th century and continued to be an important figure in the Indian literature. While her earlier works are often associated with post-Independence of India, her writing has evolved to explore her writing often explores themes of loneliness, psychological conflict and cultural dislocation. Her notable works are "*Clear Light of Day*" (1980) it was about the poignant exploration of family dynamics and the passage of time. *Fasting, Feasting* (1999) it was another Booker prize finalist; it contrasts the life of family in India with the life of their daughter in America.

*In Custody* (1984) it is a novel set in Delhi, India by Indian American writer Anita Desai. She points out the incompatibility of man and woman in carrying out their marriage, love, compatibility due to the predicament of modern world tension and stressful life. The themes of tradition and modernity in India, this book was shortlisted for Booker Prize (1984).

## 2. Female voices in Anita Desai's In Custody

This is Anita Desai's second novel to be short-listed for Booker prize. The title "*In Custody*" speaks for how trapped the characters feel and speak to the lack of social mobility in Indian's society. The internet is mind or soul of the characters struggle in the combination with external society make them imprisoned. In the earliest novel of Anita Desai concentrated the theme for on the internal consciousness of the individual person lives and suffering on the other hand the work "*In Custody*" portrays a world beyond the individual.

This novel has many characters but it focused a male protagonist Devan Sharma, who comes from a middle class family and he is a middle aged Hindi teacher and who lives in the small, dreary city of Mirpore near in Delhi. He was uninterested in wealth and status, his only true passion is Urdu poetry, but he teaches Hindi but he likes Urdu because that period Urdu disappearing fast and there are no jobs in it.

In his novel Devan was portrayed by average middle class man, he did complete his passion and suffered a lot, he goes everywhere, as a protagonist he is seen throwing from one problem to another, without getting any solution or relief.

However, the protagonist of the novel is male characters but this paper focuses on female voices, and female instances of resistances through which they manage to survive in a male dominated society. The suppression and ill-treatment was

faced by male society, it was happened in post-colonial period to till present period. The novel "In Custody" of plot and narrative, the story of Devan, a lover of writes Urdu poetry.

The women characters in the novel of *In Custody* are sealed by silence. By silencing the women, Desai rather than convincing patriarchal structure of thoughts. Anita Desai says about the novel *In Custody* one of her interview, she uses only male characters but she did write the work without using of female characters. The women characters are in the novel, they are sealed in silence still they speak lot through their narrative and action. The novel *In Custody* is mostly male oriented, there are three major women characters, Deven Sharma's wife Sarla, Nur's older wife Safiya Begum and his second wife Imtiaz Begum.

Deven Sharma and Sarla both are husband and wife but Deven and Sarla both are disliked because it was arranged marriage, there is no understanding in their life. She has been chosen as his life partner by his mother and aunts. Sarla was the daughter of Deven's aunt's friend. Sarla lived near about Deven's aunt house, so she knew her well. Desai writes "They had observed her for years and found her suitable in all way. Deven describes as "plain, penny-pinching and congenitally pessimistic." She is a responsible obedient, traditional Hindu housewife and she cooks and do many works for her husband even she did not raise her voices at in front of him and sometimes Deven insults his wife but Sarla in silence. At the same time, she expresses her anger indirect ways such as screaming out the window or spilling the table.

Sarla is deeply disappointed in her life and marriage. She dreamed of buying modern luxurious life like a refrigerator, cell phone or car but she can't afford any of them of Deven's salary. Deven has been more a poet but his wife not interested it. Deven also did not bother about his wife. In their life there is no mutual relationship among them, both emotionally disagree. Sarla being tried of this relation is silenced permanently instead. She is in silence, the influence of Sarla in Deven's life, Sarla power over. Deven can be seen from above mentioned opening lines of novel. Her "penny pinching" characters throughout spreads into Deven turning into him. Deven thinks continuously before spending his own earned money. He would have homemade food rather than canteen food. Her empowered skills to be against of orthodox patriarchal Indian society, which believes that husbands should be the controlling ones.

Murad and Deven are good friends, Murad help Deven for to wrote Urdu poetry. So to meet and interviewing Nur, who was great Urdu poet. Deven tries to meet Nur two or three times in Nur's house but Nur's second wife did not help to Deven. So his first wife makes a plan to meet outside and record Nur's work. Deven tries to record his poem, but it did not record, only background sound only recorded and then Nur tells story of him and histories. Deven focuses only on his writings. So Sarla feels unfortunate wife as she feels abandoned by a husband who seems to be more interested in poetry than his family life. But she did not show any emotions

in presence of her husband, it was the original character of Indian wife and female. Deven knew she would be angry and abuse only when she was safely out of the way is presence of kitchen and he another method of defense is to go into bedroom and refusing to speak.

The second noteworthy female character is Imtiaz Begum. The second wife of Nur, shares the same over-powering characteristics of Sarla. She has used her youth and beauty to go from a prostitute of Chandni Chowk to become the wife of well-known Urdu poet Nur. She was the major hurdle for Deven's interview with Nur. Her acting skills, enchanting beauty and her youth are her main weapons and these qualities make her impressive female character. Her strength also lies in her ability to move prostitute to a begum. Imtiaz manages over a few years to establish her reputation as a poet she has stolen Nur's talent of Urdu poetry, Nur accuses her.

In middle of the novel Imtiaz was affected by illness while clever views Imtiaz as an antagonist, then the novel clearly intends for readers to see her as a tragic figure whose struggle for recognition reflects Indian women's plight in a patriarchal society. The third important female character portrayed in "In Custody" is Nur's first wife Sophiya Begum. Sophiya is the old wife of Nur. She is mostly not referred to as Sophiya Begum, who was old woman, so Nur decides to marry young and charming beautiful Imtiaz. Polygamy is accepted by Muslim tradition; it shows Nur's lustful character. Sophiya Begum is kindred soul, hardworking women, emotionally unacknowledged by their husbands.

### 3. Conclusion

Obviously throughout the account of *In Custody* the relationship between male and female characters appears as a satisfied relationship and shares the same imbalance of the hierarchical relationship and shares the same inequalities of the hierarchical relationship of colonizer and colonized. Desai manages to create a subaltern character screaming from the margins of the very narrative form of her novel.

### References

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