

Anita Desai's *In Custody*: Unlocking the Web of Time and Space

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Concept of time and space

Semiotics is the science of signs. 'We are always surrounded by signs. Everything is a sign'. (Guivand,1975:90). 'A major thrust of semiotic research is the examination of codes (sign system) and the underlying rules that facilitate interpretability in the use of signs.' (Sharma, 2007). Semiotic analysis of any text has two meanings denotative and connotative in nature. We are aware of the denotative meaning which refers to the sign it stands for. 'Connotation' is used to "refer to the socio-cultural and 'personal' associations (ideological, emotional, etc.) of the sign. These are typically related to the interpreter's class, age, gender, ethnicity and so on" (Chandler, 1994a: 1). Although it is presumed that there is a code-sharing between the producer and the reader of a text that could maximize efficient and effective communication, connotation opens up the possibilities of meaning such that the reader could come up with diverse interpretations which depart from what the sender of the message originally intends. It must be noted, however, that connotations are not purely 'personal' meanings, for they are determined by the code to which the interpreter has access. In this sense, Chandler (1994b: 5) cites Voloshinov (1973: 23) who referred to the 'multi-accentuality' of the sign, that is, the potential for diverse interpretations of the sign according to particular social and historical contexts. This chance to uncover the playfulness of language brings to the fore the notion of 'oppositional reading' which gives room for multiplicities of meaning that audiences can choose to attach to a text while "searching for what is 'hidden' beneath the 'obvious'" (Chandler, 1994b: 2). This derives from the fact that the audience may have a very different cultural or social experience from the producer's and thus may connect signifiers to completely different signifieds. This approach to text reading is opposed to the notion of 'preferred reading' where the producer of a text designs it with certain meanings in mind and hopes that the audience will decode them in a way which ties in to hegemonic beliefs. Although the meanings generated at this level may be 'small', using McCracken's (1987: 121) term, Mick and Politi (1989: 9) posit that such 'small' meanings are in no sense immaterial, for they 'provide a looking glass on the role of personal history, self-esteem, fantasies, aspirations, doubts, fears, and other individual factors which contribute to ad-imagery interpretation'. This viewpoint underlies the nature of the analysis and discussion carried out in this study. Close attention is paid to the codification of meaning in the discourse in relation to cultural rules and social forces in the context of the situations in which the signs

are produced and received. Thus, our analytical approach in this study falls within the purview of social semiotics where attention has been given to the role of the reader in the meaning making process. Social semiotics is based on the assumption that signs and messages must always be situated within the context of social relations and processes, as the same text may generate different meanings for different readers.

Anita Desai holds a prominent position among the contemporary writers of Indo – Anglican fiction. The husband-wife alienation, temperamental incompatibility, feeling of despair and loneliness is recurring theme in the novels of Anita Desai. Anita Desai attempts to delve deep in to the dark recess of human mind. She exposes harsh social realities and analyses the characters psychologically. Her depiction is just narration and she never tries to intervene or suggest remedies for their problems. She portrays the society minutely with its suffering, anxiety, and misery. “What is the Indian way?” An American scholar, John Koller, writes that “its central idea is the possibility of human liberation from our fragmented, finite and suffering existence.” She presents her protagonists in an emotional crisis struggling in search of self-identity in the chaotic society. They have a strong sense of past, a pitiable present and long for a better future. She represents the true social structure of the society. Anita Desai creates the framework of her novel with a well made spatial and temporal matrix. The characters in her novel *In Custody* have experiences interwoven in the temporal and spatial parameters. Her narrative weaves time-space in relation to cultural dynamics.

There is probably no argument in the discourse of contemporary humanities about the semiotically meaningful nature of time and space. Different are questions about rendering the extent of meaningfulness embedded in miscellaneous spatial and temporal structures, just as well as the realms through which individual disciplines, including semiotics, approach the semiotic dimension of time-space (see, e.g. Tuan 1979; Greimas 1986; Carter *et al.* 1993; Vanneste 1996; Light, Smith 1997). The immanently meaningful nature of space is closely connected with the semiotic essence of a human being, beginning, on the one hand, from the dependence of the physical well-being of an individual on her/his ability to handle the surrounding space-time patterns, and, on the other hand, from philosophical discussions on the true nature and aim of human existence as connected with movement of semiotic structures in spatial-temporal configurations (e.g. the Platonic discourse). Today we witness contemporary searches for further human existence in (and by the help of) spatial-temporal dimensions other than the three known so far. Thus the semiotic aspects are not limited to overtly meaningful characteristics

of space (e.g. the much discussed structure of settlement space), but also include routine spatial practices (e.g. proxemics, movement), common concepts used in everyday communication (e.g. *cultural space*, *political landscape*), and mythic, philosophical and scientific interpretation of the origin, history, evolution and status of the human species (e.g. shamanism, Platonism, derivations of Einsteinian physics). It is interesting to take notice of quite extensive uses of space and time at the description of numerous cultural and environmental phenomena. One can also meet arguments on geographic (see, e.g. Lavie, Swedenburg 1996; Pilkington 1998), religious, ideological (Dorfman, Mattelart 1975), cultural (e.g. Segal 1992; Robertson *et al.* 1994) and other kinds of displacement, displacement in the discourse of fiction (e.g. Simpson 1987; Talgeri, Verma 1988) and elsewhere (see also Krupnick 1983). However, it seems to be important to stress that in order to displace a physical or cultural unit, it has to be *placed* firsthand. It is through placement of a semiotic unit into a system that provides it with the necessary distinctive features as compared with other elements of the systems. Only relationships of a semiotic unit with other elements of the system supply it with a value, if reminding of Ferdinand de Saussure's treatment (see Saussure 1959: 111–122), that makes it possible to use it in a representational text or discourse. Thus it is only after such primary placement that a meaningful unit can be displaced, i.e. placed to another (semiotic) system. And apparently the displaced semiotic units, meanings or characteristics function via connections with the original (semiotic) system, even though doing it by the so-called minus device or more or less manifested non-being in the set of the original system. If we are reminded of the practice of banishment and its history, we can simultaneously witness the mechanism and essence of both socio-cultural and territorial identification. (Anti Randviir, 2002).

Semiotic analysis of Desai's novel *In Custody* would tell us:

- a) That a substantial part of the novel is aimed at describing non-verbal activities or connotative meaning of text which are produced simultaneously with words or alternating with them.
- b) That the author , by doing so , openly acknowledges the written topographical presentation of verbal behavior to portray vividly the physical, psychological and social confrontations of the characters;
- c) That the part played by space and time that is sign systems in rising, development, sustaining and repeating emotions is remarkable;
- d) That the contemporary view on the hierarchy of spatial and temporal structures with special reference to Anita Desai's *In Custody* shows significance of 'opposites' in the post colonial Indian literature

- e) That the relation between the spatial and temporal patterns and their cultural dynamics must be the indication of certain stylistic characteristics which therefore become important touchstone for the analysis of the narrative text of the novel.

The temporal and spatial parameters of human experience are interwoven in all aspects of human life. In Ancient Indian Literature, *Dik-kala* (space and time), the *tala*-concept of Bharata, one of the most pervasive concepts of the Indian philosophy, evades every clear definition, though the literature is full of attempts to describe it. Sanskrit grammarians have conceptualized space as both close and far away. *Samipita* (nearness) and *durata* (distance) is *again kalakrta* (temporal) and *desakrta* (spatial). Various aspects relative to space and time are nowadays at the core of many scholarly disciplines. Linguistics and literature are no exceptions in this sense. Arthur Schopenhauer wrote in §18 of *On the Fourfold Root of the Principle of Sufficient Reason* (1813): "...the representation of coexistence is impossible in Time alone; it depends, for its completion, upon the representation of space; because, in mere time, all things follow one another, and in mere space all things are side by side; it is accordingly only by the *combination of time and space* that the representation of coexistence arises." In literature the idea of a unified space-time is stated by Edgar Allan Poe in his essay on cosmology titled *Eureka* (1848) that "Space and duration are one." In 1895, in his novel *The Time Machine*, H.G. Wells wrote, "There is no difference between time and any of the three dimensions of space except that our consciousness moves along it."

The protagonist, Deven, dissatisfied with the present, moves in search of his identity. He lives amidst, and in between, the often antagonistic cultural discourses that are present in the reality surrounding him. When he gets a chance to interview the famous Urdu poet Nur, he desires of creating a new identity for himself and attempts to create a mark in the world of Urdu literature. He meets Nur and with the passage of time gets disillusioned. Although he receives Nur's gift of poetry he realizes that he has been cheated by all. Deven is a common Indian man who strives for high aims but lands up again in the same position. He strives for the past or aspires for a future but is never satisfied with the present. This narrative construction forms into a third dimension, which has its own peculiar temporal and spatial structure and its own logic, which differ considerably from the traditional Western ideology of linear time.

This paper attempts to semiotically study the concept of space-time in Anita Desai's *In Custody* with the help of the concept of semiosphere – space-time in relation to the cultural dynamics as given by Yoru M. Lotman (2000), concept of space, place and non-place, as given by Auge (1995), and the concept of chronotope as given by Bakhtin

(1994). Semiotic explanation goes back to the basic properties of language. It is exciting to discuss the role of language in its various forms- visual, verbal, physical, and body manifestation- in its semiotic application. In literature there is no other device which captures imagination of the narrative in both temporal and spatial implications. Time and space are regarded as substrata of culture. Here is an attempt to outline a contemporary view on the hierarchy of spatial and temporal structures in post colonial Indian literature with special reference to Anita Desai's *In Custody*.

Space-time in relation to the cultural dynamics

Yoru M. Lotman (2000) introduced the concept of semiosphere which deals with space-time in relation to the cultural dynamics. *In Custody* deals subtly with the diminishing Islamic and Muslim culture in India and the profile of Urdu as an official language. A parallel is drawn between Urdu and Hindi which is juxtaposed with the change of cultural dynamics. With the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, the official language of India changed from Urdu to Hindi. Although the two languages are very similar and a person who speaks Urdu can understand Hindi to a great extent and vice-versa but the difference lies in the script. Urdu has Arabic script written from right to left and Hindi has Devanagari script that is written from left to right. Urdu is spoken by Muslims, who went to Pakistan and Hindi is the language of Hindus who were left behind in India. *In Custody* deals with the protagonist Deven, who is Hindu, and who has high regard for Urdu language and culture, and the Muslim Nur, the Great Urdu poet, who is no longer in demand. The culture of the people who spoke these languages had similarities yet had differences. According to Lotman, "The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism is not a separate language, but the whole semiotic space of culture in question" (Lotman 2000: 125). It also implies that any semiotic system presupposes the existence of at least two different participants that are at once similar and different. In conclusion, the definition of semiosphere entails the notion of asymmetry (dissymmetry) and heterogeneity in the semiosphere, the notion of boundary, and an assumption that any text is preceded by another text as well as the priority of the semiotic space in relation to the single acts of communication. The novel sharply highlights the social and cultural changes in postcolonial India with the description of Delhi and Nur.

Deven, the protagonist, associates Urdu with 'good times' and looks upon the language as divine. Later when 'bad times' befall upon him he has to teach Hindi Literature in Lala Ram Lal College of Mirpore. He considers himself to be caught in the profession to 'earn a living' by teaching [Hindi](#) literature to uninterested college students. He is not appreciated or regarded by the students, who make fun of him. They do not respect him as a teacher. He has not chosen his profession to be a

lecturer in Hindi. It is his 'bad' time and 'wrong placing' that has led to such a condition where he has to take care of a family. Deven feels frustrated due to lack of appreciation. He has fond childhood memory of his father who was a lover of Urdu poetry and the fact that he could narrate so many Urdu verses gave him great applaud. Perhaps that was the best part of his memory (past). After his father's death, he lost 'good times', his mother brought him to Delhi and he had to study in a Hindi medium school. Deven associates Urdu with his father and with good times:

I studied Urdu, sir, as a boy, in Lucknow. My father, he was a school teacher, a scholar, and a lover of Urdu poetry. He taught me the language. But he died. He died and my mother brought me to Delhi to live with her relations here. I was sent to the nearest school, a Hindi-medium school, sir.

Deven nurtures his dream to create a mark in the world of Urdu literature. He is exploited by his childhood friend, Murad, to interview the noted Urdu poet Noor to overcome his guilt that he is not doing anything in the field of Urdu literature. As his true interests lie in [Urdu](#) poetry, he jumps at the chance to meet the great Urdu poet, Nur. With all his hardships, Deven goes to interview Nur. He tells Nur about his love for Urdu literature. He also tells him that he is working as a temporary lecturer in Hindi literature to earn a living. Nur dismisses this excuse with contempt, suggesting that Deven should have chosen to trade in rice and oil if earning a living was his first priority. This dismissal itself shows a sharp indication of the culture in old times when to pursue literature people would leave their family and would sacrifice everything to pursue knowledge or literature (Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of knowledge). To earn money was easy and even a trader could do so.

The novel draws cultural parallelism between Hindi and Urdu as languages (as language of masses and as official language) and how the semiosphere of Urdu (along with the culture associated with it) has now, with the passage of time (post independence), reduced to a language of poetry within a limited section of society. Urdu represents India's composite culture. Urdu language and literature survive till today as it is produced by certain composite traditions of the Indo-Persian culture within the Indian subcontinent. Urdu language and literature, beyond their spatial confines, have been more heard of than read.

During the post-colonial era Urdu was the mark of a cultivated man. It is the cultural legacy of India. The greatness of the novel lies in the fact it exposes the defeated cause of promotion of Urdu poetry, which has few takers. The reasons might be political, social or regional. The

novelist, it should be noted, does not take sides or tries to convince the importance of one over the other, but narrates the events in due course of time. Urdu was popular earlier but now Hindi is taking the edge. During the very first meeting between Nur and Deven, the former teases the latter about the purpose of visit also: “It seems you have been sent here to torment me” (IC 43). When Deven reaches Nur’s house they discuss the politics of languages. The latter finds himself frightened and a little uncomfortable but Nur is accustomed to such meetings and says whatever comes to his mind. As the discussion moves to the literary awards with such remarks as the gossip in the bazaar is that

Gobind’s latest poem... will win the Sahitya Akademi Award for Hindi this year”. (IC 55) For Urdu the remark shall be: “No book was judged worthy of the award this year” (IC 55).

Nur is much frustrated at the condition of Urdu and he cannot even think of as a logical being. He tells Deven:

I tell you? Those Congress-wallahs have set up Hindi on top as our ruler. You are its slave. Perhaps a spy even if you don’t know it, sent to the universities to destroy whatever remains of Urdu, hunt it out and kill it” (IC 42-43) .

In Custody draws our attention to the importance of Urdu which was:

The language of the court in the days of royalty – now languishes in the back lanes and gutters of the city. No place for it to live in the style to which it is accustomed, no emperors and nawabs to act as its patrons” (IC 15).

Deven soon realizes that the culture (semiosphere) in the present time is changing and the people who were the real admirers of Urdu poetry and Urdu literature are declining. The evening meetings in Nur’s house where they discuss mundane topics over biryani and drinks rather symbolize their lack of serious effort. They are passing their time or killing time. There is lack of interest in literature even among people who come to Nur’s house to listen to his poetry. They are shallow and are interested in eating and drinking and making merry. This crowd has actually come to hear Nur’s second wife, who was a dancer. The wrath of the writer is evident. When a visitor comments adversely on Nur, Nur does not even reply. Deven abhors this group of ‘shopkeepers, clerks, bookies and unemployed parasites’ (IC 50).

Auge’s concept of place and non-place: Delhi and Mirpore

In a famous soliloquy in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Hamlet speaks of *the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns*. A *place* is a particular portion of space, or space in general; a time and place. The immanently meaningful nature of space is closely connected with human

being. Space that surrounds him, his ability to handle the space surrounding him and the philosophic discourse of the actual aim of his existence. The space is not limited to the structure of settlement space or place but also include the routine spatial practices that are studied in communication like proxemics or movement, but also include mythic, philosophical or scientific study of space as in Platonism, derivations of Einsteinian physics. The concept of place may be change at different time periods and in face of different uses in social, cultural or political context. In this conceptual analysis, two different concepts of “place” shall be compared. Place was defined by the French anthropologist Marc Augé in 1995. Augé, uses a notion of place which already contains the sense of “anthropological place” with language and movement in it. Place, he asserts, “can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity” (p. 77). According to Augé, the concept of place is opposed to the concept of a non-place (p. 79). This is described as a “space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (p. 77-8) and is thus devoid of emotion and memory.

The setting of *In custody* is in Mirpore and Delhi, the two cities contrast the narrative with their strange contradiction. One is famous other is anonymous. Delhi fits in Augé’s concept of place. It has identity of its own. It has a culture (identity). Unlike Mirpore, Delhi has a history attached to it. It is associated with a glorious past (history). It is the capital city. It is a city that is along the river Yamuna (relational). It is related with the prime characters in the novel and is also associated with the identity of characters living in it like Nur or Deven’s practical and cunning friend, Murad, who is the publisher or Noor’s second wife who is smart enough to understand the importance of her husband’s past and wants to make money out of it. Nur has memories attached to old Delhi.

Augé’s concept of place is clearly charged with emotion and memory. Thus it can be useful to review Augé’s concept of place as the “location in which individuals . . . form human relationships... places are filled with individual identities, language, references, unformulated rules’. Delhi is where Deven forms relationships of friendship (Murad, Nur), recording together with the assistant, and succeeds in seeking help of Noor’s first wife.

Place adds to the individual’s identity. Nur is very much identical to Chandni Chawk in old Delhi, where he lives. This place is old as is Nur and is crowded just like Nur is surrounded by people who give him little importance but both had a glamorous past. Mirpore is similar to Deven, moving directionless in the realm of time. Delhi presents a contrast of old and new. Deven was surprised to know that Nur enjoyed Byron and Shelley in the true spirit of Delhi by accepting and appreciating anything wondrous. Deven goes to old Delhi to interview Nur in the lanes of Chandni Chowk, which he describes as “bazaar encountered in a

nightmare” (IC 38). He continues to wander in the lanes, which had old stained buildings, shops and different stalls. The description in the novel is very apt:

They walked past shady-looking and evil-smelling shops where herbal medicines and panaceas were being wrapped in paper packets by men who looked too ostentatiously like quacks, past booths in which astrologers and palmists and soothsayers had spread out the exotic tools of their trade...(IC 39)

Deven could not help noticing the open flowing gutter, a humped bull munching paper and a hospital with fading green walls. For him, it was a nightmare. What was more appalling for him was that a great poet lived in an ambience like this. He tells the boy who was guiding him that, “We must be lost. This is not the right place. It is no use to go further. I’m not going on.” (IC 39) His romantic versions of the abode of the great poet are thwarted, and along with him, the readers are also made aware of the changes in *old* Delhi. Anita Desai observes minutely and as Tripathi says she “possesses one of the healthiest and psychologically most balanced minds in the realm of Indo – Anglican fiction (Tripathy 1).

Murad, on the other hand, symbolizes the New Delhi or the modern Delhi. He wants Deven to interview Nur so that the saleability of his journal increases. He is also like ‘chameleon’ and crafty and could easily lure Deven. He teased Deven and made fun of him. He is practical and unemotional. He has modern ideas of using recorder for the poetry. He is fast and thinks that he knows what he wants. “In the semiotic square opposing forces are seen as parts of a unified system in movement that may be used to describe a psychological structure of the characters or the thematic structure of the work as a whole”.(Shukla, Bhasha: Shakespearean Dramas- a semiotic approach: 2007).

The contrast is also shown in the modern methods of recording, through the tape, and the flow of poetry, that flows naturally, failing all the artificial means to capture the past. Mirpore, on the other hand, fits in completely under the criteria of a non place. Non-place is the “Space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity” (Auge: p. 77-8) and is thus devoid of emotion and memory. Mirpore is a small town located on the outskirts of Delhi. Unlike most of the towns in the country, it does not have a river flowing through it (relational and identity: factors that concerns with the identity of a city or a town). Mirpore lacked the sense of history:

Although it lacked history, the town had probably existed for centuries in its most basic, most elemental form. Those shacks of tin and rags, however precarious and impermanent they looked, must have existed always, repetitively and in succeeding

generations, but never fundamentally changing and in that sense enduring. (IC 18)

The protagonist, Deven, is also very similar to Mirpore. It turned into that strip of no-man's land that lies around a prison, threatening in its desolation. He has no sense of belonging to Mirpore. He stays in Mirpore just to earn a living:

Then, after he graduated and married and came to Mirpore to teach, it became for him the impassable desert that lay between him and the capital with its lost treasures of friendships, entertainment, attractions and opportunities. (IC 24).

Deven lacks confidence whether he has to teach students or to interview Nur, he feels jittery. He attributes this character of a 'non-person' to lack of resources. He is bullied by Murad because he is timid, pessimist, and lacks courage. Students mock at him and would threaten him: "Meet us behind the college and see what we do to you" (IC 200). Unable to answer, the destitute he swerves, he gives up in the hands of fate and searches for excuses for his failure. When Murad gives him the chance to interview Nur, he had

"...nightmares in which he struggled towards an unspecified destination but was repeatedly waylaid and deflected, never in any stretch of sleep arriving at it any more than he did in waking". (IC 31).

Deven has given up in the hands of destiny and although he lures for Delhi or for establishing a name in Urdu literature, he is unable to change his condition. He has ample excuses for it. He does not want to change. He has adapted and adjusted with Mirpore. He has become Mirpore.

Even Sarla, Deven's wife symbolizes Mirpore. She was the choice of Deven's mother and aunts. She seemed to be a perfect bride for Deven because she was "penny-pinching and congenitally pessimistic". She had her own aspirations as a wife but they vanished as she realized the pitiable condition of her husband. Sarla, like Deven had given up to the destiny. Against the backdrop of her novel Anita Desai incorporates the economic and social expositions of the society. Deven is the only bread earner who is well aware that he could not fulfill Sarla's aspirations. He pursues literature to run away from the realities of life. The communication gap between him and Sarla is bridged by their son Manu.

Bakhtinian concept of chronotope

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, the Russian philosopher and semiotician, gave the concept of chronotope that refers to an intersection of time and space. Bakhtinian chronotope stresses the importance of

temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. Apart from being inextricably interwoven in all aspects of life, when it comes to literature, the temporal and spatial parameters of human experience move beyond their familiar dualism and are merged into space-time, inherent in every narrative work. The activity of narrating a story correlates with the temporal character of human experience. Thus, time is articulated through a narrative mode, while narrative acquires its full meaning when embedded in temporal existence (Ricoeur 1984). Bakhtin observes that “*living* artistic perception (which also of course involves thought, but not abstract thought) makes no such divisions and permits no such segmentation” (Bakhtin 1994). In literature and art, he claims, the temporal and spatial are inseparable. Since Bakhtinian chronotope stresses the importance of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature.

There are many references in the novel where time and space (chronotope) are strongly dependent on each other. Many incidents in the story are entwined with time and place. Time-space have a representation through past, present and future. Nur’s wife offers Deven a specific time and place, the room on the third floor where they would not be disturbed. Deven visits Nur at a time when there is no visitor. He slips through narrow wooden door and moves up the stairs. The narrow lanes of Chandni chawk, the narrow entry to Nur’s house, the crowded bus all represent the diminishing space in the modern times. Bakhtinian chronotope takes lead in merging the two into an intersection of time and space. Although abstract thought could be related to time and space as separate entities, defining them apart from the emotions and values attached to them, Nur has lost his ‘good times’, charisma and glittery like Delhi. Nur says:

Before Time crushes us into dust we must record our struggle against it. We must engrave our name in the sand before the wave comes to sweep it away and make it part of the ocean. (IC 131).

The chronotope is interwoven in all aspects of life. The dinner at Nur’ house was similar to the dinner at Siddiqui, the Urdu Lecturer, who makes up with Chotu as apprentice and calls for kebab and pilao. At home, Siddique transformed from a college lecturer to ‘a connoisseur of food and music’. (IC 157). Siddique’s house is similar to Nur’s but nearly in ruins. Time and place coexist as the story proceeds. When Deven goes to Delhi, everything seems to go out of control- his friend, Murad tape recorder, his meeting with Nur. Strangely enough time changes and is favorable for Deven in Mirpur, when he plans with the Urdu professor to buy a tape recorder. He gets the permission soon after.

Time has a powerful bearing on man's life, emotions, thoughts, and experiences. It makes its presence felt on both the physical and psychic planes of human experience" (Kanwar, 7). The psychology of a person changes with time and place but sometimes it does not change with time and place. Deven and Murad have been together since the times of childhood. Deven certainly gets an inferiority complex as he encounters Murad. An association with Murad will lead to earning more money. Murad is the son of a rich businessman who wants to earn more, but he never pays Deven for his contributions for Awaaz. Shrewd Murad knows how to bully Deven. It is evident from the story that he has been doing this since their childhood. "You village pumpkin..." and "...haven't you seen or heard, you donkey..." (IC 91). Deven reiterates: 'Look, don't use all those animal names...' (IC 91). He could always force Deven (in past and in present) into doing things for his own profit. Deven knows this but is helpless and is not able act under the dominance of a rich Delhi publisher. Even as a lecturer Deven finds it difficult to come out of the strong influence of Murad "...still a two-cigarette man". (IC 10).

Deven also understands that Murad has no passion for Urdu literature and poetry but it is just for the salability of his magazine Awaaz and earning money that he is publishing a new issue on Urdu poetry. Deven calls him 'chameleon' (IC 34). Even Nur dislikes Muad and calls him a joker. Deven still wants to interview Nur just to be "in the presence of no other than the greatest living poet of Delhi, his hero since childhood" (IC 34). While on the assignment of Nur's interview, Deven becomes disillusioned about Nur and his family. After witnessing Nur's house in a shambles, Deven decides to give up this task of interviewing Nur. The two wives of Nur were hell bent upon to prove their supremacy:

Deven looked to see if rescue was at hand, and saw an old creature wrapped in a brown cloak, her white hair combed about the sides of her face. The face was commanding, so straight in its lines, so military in its firmness. 'Run away from here, bitch,' she said in a level voice, and in a corner – Ali was heard to snigger- 'and leave the old man alone. What more do you want from him? You have taken his name and his reputation and today even his admirers. ...go dance before the public since that is your manner of earning a living—"The younger woman who had appeared stricken by apoplexy, leapt at her with a screech. Nur's bed lay between the two ... (IC 89-90).

Interestingly the concept of space has been adapted by the placing of Nur's bed, or is it Nur himself, lying trapped between the two struggling ladies (one from his past and the younger from his present). This constitutes yet another aspect of proxemics. The behavior of these two rival women projects the art of portrayal by the novelist, which hammers the hurdles on the path of Deven. S. B. Bhambhar says: "...

Anita Desai is especially noted for her sensitive portrayal of the inner life of her female characters". (125). "The novels of Anita Desai present characters undergoing an inner psychological turbulence arising out of a conflict between reality and the illusions that characters build up for themselves" (Panigarhi & Kirpal,70). Deven is caught between his anxiety to interview Nur and the plight of facing Nur's wives. The cultural gap is evident here. Deven is alienated. "The encounter with another culture which has developed its in-built structures brings the process of individual enhancement to a standstill" (Wandrekar, 147).

Deven is pestered by Murad to visit Nur again but this time with a tape recorder. To purchase a tape recorder and record Nur's interview, Deven had borrowed money from his college. His sincere most efforts did not bear any fruit. The Urdu lecturer, Mr. Siddiqi, who is not interested in Urdu promotion, helps him in his Endeavour to purchase a tape recorder. To his various questions, Deven answers:

...I was fooled and cheated by everyone – the man who sold me the second hand equipments, the technician who said he could do the recording but was completely inexperienced; by Murad who said he would pay and did not, by Nur who had never told me he wanted to be paid, and by his wife, wives, all of them... (IC 199).

Conclusion

With the passage of time Deven becomes disillusioned about his favorite poet. This constitutes a semiotic break. It violates that basic code by which the relations are governed in any particular society. Nur is much weaker and infirm kind of a person who is fond of drinks. He vomits in the house after drinking and his wife humiliates him for drinking. He has a second wife, a dancer, who married him to earn against his name as a poet. People come to Nur's house not to hear his poetry, but to listen to her. She is still close to Nur. After Nur's death, she sends Nur's bills and poems to Deven. The novel ends when Deven finally accepts the gift of Nur's poetry from Nur's second wife. Perhaps "that meant he was custodian of Nur's very soul and spirit. (IC: 239). But this has been gained only after Nur' death, which is again associated with the expression of time. According to Indian temporal scheme, 'the prestige of beginning' is the most clearly asserted in the cyclic theory of creation of the world, its differentiation through the four successive 'yugas', its destruction and reexamination. 'Kala' means both time and death.(Shukla : Semiotica Indica :1994). *The Waste Land* (1922) sums up the human condition as:

'We who are living are now dying
With a little patience.' (WL V)

Deven wants to stay in the past and does not move from the old to new destinations. His isolation, alienation and depression are the result

of his clinging to the past when everyone else has moved ahead with time. A group of widows passing over to temple in the morning with a song sung which portrays Deven's mental condition:

“O Will you come along with us
Or stay back in the pa-ast?”

O will you come along... (IC 132)

Anita Desai's fiction has strong psycho-somatic overtones. It has cultural undercurrent equipped with dualities of meaning. The paper explores the binary patterns and observes how Desai juxtaposes traditionalism with modernism, emotion with rationalism, material with immaterial, presence with absence, attachment with detachment, self with other, fame with anonymity, and masses with classes. In the novel culture defines the way of life. The main aim of this paper has been to bring together the different spatial and temporal concerns which contribute all the way to cognitive analysis, bordering psycho-analysis, and socio-cultural exposition. Thus, it is an attempt to articulate the diversity of time-space perspective which demonstrates constant changes in society. By discovering new physical spaces, culture also has to adjust its conceptual realm to the new situation proposed by time, extending thereby its conceptual space. The advancement of semiospherical knowledge, Bhaktian chronotope and Augé's concept of space, in turn, often involves at least a conditional enlargement of semiotic knowledge in order to expand cultural conceptions. Thus culture continuously extends its identification space with time, conquers new (either physical or conceptual) spaces, also entailing thereby the need for rearranging behavioral patterns in the semiotic sense. The 'conceptual primitiveness' has been revisited through the study of *In Custody*. Marred by time and place, the protagonist moves in search of his identity. The presentation of the culture and characters is close to the life in twentieth century India. 'True to the temper of our times, there are no heroes, no big chested ideologies, and no utopias that will provide complete solutions to our problems'. Gurcharan Das, (TEP, 2002).

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