

## Anita Desai's *In Custody* a novel of hopes and flops

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### Abstract

The writers of Diaspora are branded for using many of the autobiographical elements in their works. The factors of Diaspora are shown by portraying some real life incidents through their literary texts. Meena Alexander, one of the prolific writers of Indian origin shows this fact through her creative art. The striking memories of motherland are overshadowed in almost all her poems.

**Keywords:** Anita Desai's *In Custody*, hopes, flops

### 1. Introduction

Birth place with Buried Stones, one of Meena Alxenader's collections of poems discloses several features of immigrant writers holding the echoes of otherness in the migrated land and homeland. With a nice lyricism, her poems convey the fragmented experience of the traveler, for whom home is both nowhere and everywhere. Wherever and whenever she goes, she feels the strangeness.

Like all other poets, Meena Alexander's poems also deal with the themes of love, war, effects of violence and dislocation. In this Collection of poems she widely talks the feelings of time and space. She was shifted from India to New York. How this change of space influences her literary career and affects her real life. What kind of memories she has to share with us from her nostalgic past being in sweet homeland. The answers for these questions may find good values. But now the dream of being a first citizen cannot find life in the poet's life. A kind of otherness is felt by her. Through this study let us see how these poems express such feelings.

Human life revolves around hopes. Hopes keep us going. But some unexpected flops break us sometimes. Reading Anita Desai's touching novel 'In Custody' will bring us to this reality. Hope is a key concept in many classics and contemporary fictional works. It is used as a motivating force to show the changes in main characters. The protagonist of the novel discusses here is a college lecturer, named Deven Sharma. He fails to face the flops in his life as he has many hopes to have. But the self-realization only gives solution to his soul by the end of the novel.

The novel is about an unimpressive lecturer of Hindi, named Deven Sharma. Actually he had great love upon Urdu poetry and hopes to become a poet. But after the completion of his graduation and marriage he came to Mirpur a suburb area to work as a lecturer of Hindi. The life in Mirpur felt like deserted and he lost his friendships, entertainment and all the colours of his life. It felt like living in an uninhibited island. It seems the first flop in his life. His interest in Urdu poetry brought him to higher hopes through the admiration towards the famous Urdu poet, Nur Shahjehanbadi.

The hopes in the novel open with the arrival of Murad, Deven's old classmate and friend at Mirpur. He assigns a wonderful opportunity for Deven to interview Nur, the great poet for his magazine. The golden rays of hope to meet his beloved poet

brought him out of the classroom. He lost interest in taking classes as a failure teacher. After the discussion Murad informed him that his magazine only runs to keep alive the glorious tradition of Urdu poetry. Murad presented here as the selfish friend of Deven. He pushes Deven into a series of flops. Though it was after many compulsions from Murad Deven was excited to go to Delhi having a dream of meeting Nur in mind. Nur's verses inspired Deven a lot. He seems shocked when he finds the greatly admired poet at his residence. Because he was in great enjoyment with the company of two wives including an earlier prostitute, Imtiaz Beegum. Moreover Deven seems sunken in despair when Nur blames him for disturbing him and being a lecturer of Hindi. Nur tells him that Urdu has died before years and now the ghost of it only exists in India. The blaming words from the poet, adored as God created sparks of flops in his thought as he loves the Urdu literature. The bad atmosphere also disappoints him and Deven seems afraid of having hope on the world of poetry any more seeing the life style of a great poet.

His first unsatisfactory meeting with Nur made a thought in his mind that all his dreams turned into nightmares. On the way back to Mirpur his bus crashes a dog and the neighbor sitting beside him philosophically tells that the death of the dog is a blessing of God to living animal because for them there is only misery and suffering in the world between birth and death. Deven goes straightly to college fearing the angry face of wife Sarala in home. But when he reaches home he got a 'warm' welcome; Sarala considered him as a stranger. He expected his wife will redeem his pressure. But she never made an attempt to be close with him. But he got the company of his little son Manu, and having talks and walks with him Deven found relax from all of the troubles received from the first visit to Nur. Meantime Nur sends a letter to Deven inviting him to work as his secretary. Though he was not ready to go at first, Deven made his mind ready to go there again after the cunning compulsion of Murad. Moreover his worship on Nur brought him there. He compared the sickening body of Nur to the state of Urdu literature in mind. But the worship upon the great soul never helped Deven to realise his own dream. The hard reality of the world again makes his hope a flop.

Deven again felt as deceived by Murad when he finds the residence of Nur having the Celebration of Imtiaz Beegum's birthday. Nur gives assurance to help Deven by appearing for

an interview and promises to recite some of his unpublished verses. And Deven also decides to write a full book on the life of Nur if he allows sometime for him. But the arrival of two wives crashes his hope again. Since Deven was behind the schedule Murad advises him to have a tape recorder to collect speech and recitations of Nur. Deven again flies on the wings of hope to write a biography of the great Urdu poet. After purchasing a second-hand tape-recorder by the financial assistance received from the Urdu department of his college through his colleague Siddique, Deven with an assistant named Chiku reaches Nur's home. But he found that the condition was not to have an interview because of the fever of Nur's second wife. Moreover she told that nobody will like to listen to his shaking voice. Deven was in a failure mood but when Nur asked his wife to go to hospital he felt overjoyed of the possibility of the much awaited interview. But she rejected the plan of Deven very cruelly to discuss any subject regarding Nur's poetry. But Nur's first wife Safia Beegum agrees to arrange an occasion to him for the interview. But she demanded money for the same. This shocks him and finds his newly aroused hope of success shattered.

Deven thought of calling the final whistle to the project after all the goals touched the bars. Deven is in despair after the consecutive flops against his hopes. His wife Sarala's doubt on his continuous journey to Delhi pains him more. When he gets another letter from Nur inviting him to copy down the poet's new poem Deven again climbs into the steps of hopes. But the demand of Safia Beegum comes as a hindrance there. But his hopes again come to light when his friend Siddique comes forward by helping him to get money from their college as a payment to Nur. Here a load of problems comes together that the head of his department fires him for the frequent leaves and above all Sarala's problems. Deven suggests Sarala to stay with her parents. Now we can see that Deven has learned from his failures and he has big hope that all efforts will make a successful end once. After paying the money Deven and Chiku witnessed for the crowded arrival Nur with his wives. The scene creates another failure because of the mistaken recording of Chiku, the violent atmosphere and the threat of Murad on deduction of his remuneration. On the last day of this session as a wonder to all Nur recited some line that anyone of them heard never before. Deven tried to take down those lines but for his wonder Nur himself took the note from Deven and wrote for him. Deven reached in a mood of realisation of his artistic relationship with Nur. These moments filled a sense of fulfillment in his mind. The tired words of Nur put an end to the interview:

*"What I have waiting for me six feet of earth in cemetery by the mosque"*

Miseries continue due to the faulty recording of Chiku. But Murad was in confidence to do the editing process to get the clear words of Nur from the interview. But still the tape was not well to submit before the college authority. Deven feels isolated and stays awoken at night evaluating the exam papers of his students. But the other letter received from Nur including the room rent bill made him nervous again. Murad also refuses to do any help. Reaching at a park in Delhi Deven finds solution from the nature by looking at the Dome of a mosque. Deven's awareness of the nature through these experiences made him to change his view on life. His mind began to settle with the

emotional sufferings. He realised that he was suffering because of his thoughts to shift the responsibility of his failures to others. When he lies alone he cannot sleep because of the thoughts upon the board meeting of the college authorities on the night. In these moments death comes as the only way to escape from sufferings.

Finally Deven remembers Nur and tries to evaluate his greatness though he had some dishonorable deeds. This evaluation of his qualities renews his faith in Nur's poetry and he gets his intimacy upon the Urdu poetry indirectly. He becomes conscious of the eternal nature of his relationship with the great poet. Really he became the custodian of Nur's soul and spirit. After undergoing many pressures and flops Deven receives a great change in his life. He becomes more confident and learns strategies of life. He has now learnt to say no to people like his selfish friend Murad.

### 1.1 How the flops solve?

We can see many hopes and also flops with them in the life of Deven, the protagonist of the novel. He was really in the custody of boundless sufferings and flops. But at the end of the novel we can see that Deven reaches into a state of grateful inner strength when he decides to accept and endure whatever disasters happen to him. The final state of Deven has beautifully portrayed with inspirational lines in the novel:

*"Soon the sun would be up and blazing. The day would begin with its calamities. They would flash out of the sky and cut him down like swords. He would run to meet them"*

*(In Custody Page.296).*

The nature plays a great role in the novel. Deven realises the reality from it and his view on life also changes by the awareness of the nature. He does not feel annoyed by his wife's graceless look. He does not feel a destroyed though all the attempts to interview the poet were a failure. Deven undergoes a lot of pressure and a big change. He becomes more confident and learns tactics. He has now learnt to say no to people. Here Deven attained strength to face the calamities and flops clearly mentioned to make the novel's ending a remarkable one. There was no need of an extraordinary power or source to put an end to his flops.

### 2. Conclusion

By looking into the deep of the novel 'in custody' we can see that it discusses the ups and down in human life rather than tracing out the issues related to the fall of Urdu poetry and language problems. Anita Desai not only mentioned the hopes and flops in the life of Deven but also the novel pours down the realities which are social and common. The solutions to avoid flops in life also mentioned by the end of the novel that it is related to the human psychology and self-realisation. Thus the endurance upon disasters and failures will make us strong and it will create strength of mind in us to face all the problems. It is indeed a worthier realization of Deven that in life every question has its answer and every problem a solution. This realization gets into the mind of Deven when Nur passes away. He got a chance to enter into the custody of Nur's divine spirit to which he showed life long worship. Through this he started to run through the roads of reality and his views changed. The dust and cobwebs in his mind disappeared. Composed by Anita Desai, the novel is a portrait of human lives as it exists in their

own circumstances of hopes and flops. It teaches us that 'failures will teach us lessons'.

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