

Q. Critically analyse Anita Desai's views of different thematic conflicts as depicted by her *In Custody*.

Or

Discuss different themes as portrayed by Anita Desai in her novel *In Custody*.

Or

Consider Anita Desai as a novelist of modern times with particular reference to her novel *In Custody*.

Ans: Anita Desai is a very popular Indian novelist. She is known as the Mother of the Indian psychological novel genre. Her meticulous depictions of modern Indian life have secured her a place of honor in the pantheon of Indian authors. Winner of the Sahitya Academy Award, Desai has authored as many as sixteen works of fiction. Most of her novels deal with her personal experience of life. She never patronized a single theme or message. She believed in citing the truth as it is. Her sensitive portrayal of the inner feelings of her female characters is excellent. Many of Anita Desai's novels explore tensions between family members and the alienation of middle-class women.

Desai's works deal with contemporary Indian life, culture clashes between the East and the West, generational differences, and practical and emotional exile.

The novel *In Custody* is set during the post-partition period and the massive movement of Muslims towards Pakistan is the main reason for the gradual lack of interest in Urdu language. The small and quasi non-existent Urdu Department in Deven's college clearly mirrors the linguistic doom of the Urdu language. Siddiqui, the Head of Department of Urdu language, is described as being idle and unenthusiastic. He points out how Muslims are deserting India to move elsewhere and that Urdu language is gradually becoming as rare as "cashew nuts". Further, the theme of Existentialism is evident in the novel. Deven's purpose of existing is highly questioned all throughout the novel. His profession as a Hindi Lecturer or even his marital life are not satisfying enough for him. His life in Mirapore seems to have been shaped for him by Sarla, his wife and his poor family background. He is a failed Hindu Lecturer, an unloved husband and father. Interviewing Nur has somehow given him a reason to be. If he succeeds in interviewing Nur, it will not only awaken a feeling of accomplishment but also give a meaning to his life.

The theme of Friendship has also been both a boon and a curse to Deven. Murad, despite his flaws, turns out to be a blessing for Deven. His proposal to interview Nur, turns Deven's meaningless life into an eventful one. The friendship between Deven and Raj, on the other hand, seems more genuine and is a selfless one. Though far, Raj is able to help Deven by providing him shelter in Darya Ganj. But the obstacles faced by Deven in terms of his marital relationship with Sarla seem to be having a controlling hand on Deven's life. She seems to be restricting him from following his dreams. She perpetually reminds him that dreams and passion cannot feed a family. As a matter of fact, both Deven and Sarla are trapped in an unhappy marriage. They are both victims of an arranged marriage.

Moreover, location plays a great role in the novel to represent the novelist's purpose. The two settings of Mirapore and Delhi have significantly affected the life of the protagonist, Deven. They are also closely linked to one of the major themes of this novel, the theme of

Existentialism. Mirpore is introduced as a polluted and manacled town, a land with limited opportunities while Delhi as land for hope and fulfilment.

Thus Anita Desai is a great novelist. She is popular in the entire world. She has made a solid path for the coming generations. The works of Anita Desai in the literature field for about five decades now clearly defines her position in the rank of the world's top writers. Her majestic trail in the long journey in literature from her childhood to old age shows her true depiction of commitment, enthusiasm and self-motivations that the society today needs to inculcate in the new culture. The challenges such as gender discrimination addressed by Desai affect most societies in the world, especially the third world countries. She therefore brings forward the challenge for the world communities to review historical development of their cultures, the changes and the improvements which have henceforth taken place. Her thematic exploration in social and cultural aspects of life creates awareness and assertiveness, especially to women in the society today. The role of culture and psychology in literature should be appreciated as Desai has endlessly supported it.