

Q. Sketch the character of Deven Sharma.

Ans : In her pursuit to find out the true meaning of existence, Anita Desai makes her characters her mouthpiece. They are not simply representatives or cardboard creatures. They do not simply stand for a certain society or a certain moment in history.

Deven Sharma is the main character of the novel *In Custody*. He is introduced as a character who seems to have known more disappointments in his life than the sense of fulfillment. He is far from being a passionate Hindi professor and he reminds readers of the character of Krishna, from R.K Narayan's *The English Teacher*.

Deven is a 'two-cigarette' man, that is a victim of imposed limits. He is in a forced-marital relationship with his wife, Sarla, practicing a profession he is not passionate about and living in a garbage-filled and restricted area, Mirpore.

Urdu language is what makes Deven feel alive. He is a dedicated and die-heart passionate of Urdu poetry. His strong love for Urdu poetry and mostly Nur, the Urdu poet even makes him violate certain rules in his life. Urdu poetry makes him forget his family and professional duties when he decides to travel to Old Delhi, more specifically, Chandni Chowk, to meet his idol, Nur. He indeed becomes "in custody" of Nur and his wives and most importantly his friend, Murad.

Deven's meetings with Nur are highly symbolical as they reflect his ultimate love and passion for Urdu poetry. He describes Nur as a divine figure and even among all the cacophonies at Nur's place, Deven's worship of Urdu poetry remains unchanged. He is a determined character and does not want to give up despite the numerous obstacles.

Deven's character is made appealing by the fact that despite being the protagonist of this novel, he bears many characteristics of an antagonist ( villainous character). He is portrayed mostly as someone who is rather self-focused. His marriage had rendered him slaved to his family. He has been working as a Hindi Lecturer at Lala Ram Lal College mostly to sustain his family. However, Murad's proposal to interview Nur triggered a major shift in him. His focus changes from his family to Nur. He is certainly a failure as a husband, a father and a Hindi lecturer.

Anita Desai's elementary concern in her novels is to explore and to expound human psyche and self. In the contemporary socio-political set up the predicament of the modern man does seem to be one of the dominant interests of the novelist and Deven's character speaks volumes about it.