



A Study of Cultural Metaphoricity in Anita Desai's Novel 'In Custody'

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Abstract- Texts are loaded with diversity of meanings: literal, metaphorical, allegorical and analogical to name a few. As such languages embed in them identity, culture and ideology of the people it is penned down about. Linked to religious identity of Muslims pre- and post-partition Urdu saw its rise in religious and Sufi writings. But with the rise of Hindu nationalism and decline of Muslim rule in the sub-continent it suffered pangs of estrangement. Anita Desai's 'In Custody' pen-pictures Urdu which is metaphorically destined to death in India. Publication year of the book coincides with the death of a renowned poet Faiz Ahmed Faiz which metaphorically reinforces death of Urdu. Deven who interviews Nur, famous poet of Urdu so that shreds of the language can be preserved. Her novel artistically and beautifully blends realistic elements rooted in history and sham narrative elements. The present paper investigates cultural metaphoricity of Urdu in Desai's novel 'In Custody' in the light of theories put forwarded by Norman Fairclough and Van Dijk concerning language, identity, and ideology.

Keywords: Identity, language, culture, Metaphoricity

I. INTRODUCTION

Identity infuses life in us. It energizes us. It gives us purpose. It lightens hope. It unfolds and demystifies who am I? Why am here? What am I becoming? We use language to express these identities both personal and social. So, identities are seen as linguistic phenomenon as language not only verbalizes it but also constructs it. Language is pulsation and throb of the people. In it are cultures, traditions, ideologies, and histories of the people. To think of one is to think of other. (Rovira, 2008) Such is the bond between identity and language as the bond between heart and throbbing. They complement each other. Absence of one is absence of other. Applying this principle, Lord Macaulay in order to fortify their rule suggested for the replacement of Arabic and Persian in the sub-continent with English language. In five Minutes of Education, he says with replacement of language they would be Indian in looks but English in character. People of the sub-continent will be learning English ways of life, acquiring their morals, building their tastes, and doing things on their pattern. Hence cultured and civilized like their masters. (Eaglestone, 2002)

The very identity of an individual, ethnic, or racial group embedded in their use of language, its production at social and cognitive level among the social actors of the group they belong to (Fairclough, 2010, Janks (2014). Discourses emanate socio-political and cultural practices which stands in close connection with Gramsci's common-sense hegemony and Althusser's concept of interpellation. Working and implementation of which takes place through public and private institutions such as media, schools, and other organizations. (Van Dijk, 1998). The discourses produced through these institutions bring about change in the ideological practices and they maintain interests of elite and thus certain ideological and cultural practices. Western colonizing mission communicated as white men's burden to civilize other nations considered as inferior is the byproduct of such a thinking. Embracing such an ideology, English language was introduced in the sub-continent because the local languages and cultures were deemed as inferior. Therefore they introduced English language. With it they will have hegemony on the sub-continent as the people will be exposed to English literature. Consequently, they will change their outlook and can easily accomplish their goals.

Polarization between Pakistan and India is offshoot of identity based on language which renders both Hindus and Muslims having different outlook on and of life. Urdu language was taken as the representative of Muslims and herald of unity among them. With it they fought for their independence and sought it. Similarly, Hindus employed Hindi as their tool to bring people together on one platform. Thus, a rift was invited through language. After partition majority of Muslim voted to join Pakistan. Those who were left behind had to accept dominance and hegemony of Hindi. But longing among both Urdu and Hindi continues to stay among fragments which has never been uprooted as the two language grew together and flourished together. Anita Desai's novel is the exploration and bring to light such a longing existing on both sides. She has chosen characters wisely and to bridge the gap between the two groups she has chosen Devan, a Hindu as the custodian of Urdu language and Urdu representatives holding feeble position. Role of English is of paramount value as English is used highlight the existing problem and declining of Urdu language and culture. The current study is qualitative in design and explores through metaphorical analysis of the text to ascertain what meanings are communicated through such a use.

Anita Desai is a prolific writer with international reputation. Her characters embody constant struggle and quest for fulfilled identity. Her novels are the epitome of emotional and psychological conflicts of the characters within the framework of search for stable meaning. Most of her earlier novels revolve around woman characters, voice women oppression and deal with feminist issues and patriarchal orders. They label patriarchal orders 'them' and them as 'us'. Thus, they challenge such orders which makes their position marginal and seek equality. Thus, deal untiring women struggle for the fulfilment of their identity. Contrary to these themes the novel 'In Custody' which was also shortlisted for Booker Prize portrays the pathos of a man and women on the path of identity fulfilment. The novel is about the political aspect of language, about injustice and inequality in social practices, about cultural conflicts especially about threatened and bullied position of Urdu language and culture pushed on the verge of extinction after partition. Beauty of the novel lies in the paradoxical approaches the novelist has portrayed the characters in the novel each with a suffering and longing.

Devan, the protagonist in the novel, is experiencing prison like life in this world. The very antinomy is that he is lecturer in Hindi, but his passion is Urdu in which he wants to earn identity. It is his love; without it he imagines life hollow and empty. His lean stature reveals the feebleness of the language he adores. As such he is shown helpless, humble, agonized, and dissatisfied. Life he owns, job he holds as a Hindi lecturer, Sarla who has come into marital bond appear to be the things thrust upon him and make his life insipid and void of meaning. (Rani 2017).

A ray of hope shines in his hear when Murad, his childhood friend, has created him an opportunity to interview Nur, a revered poet of Urdu of the time. He imagines him as demigod and savior of Urdu. The opportunity brings him nothing but fleeting happiness. As interviewing him, he discovers him disgusting, hurling abusive language which is another antinomy. Apparent esteemed name is hollow. The poet is externally on sublime status as a poet but inwardly lowest and mean which is manifested through his conversation with Devan who unlike him is rich in passion and love for Urdu internally but externally, he is helpless. Nur's house displays all the emptiness of culture, for his first wife is greedy and his second wife ambitious and abusive as she once had been a prostitute. So is the look of Nur's house which is furnished with old and dusty furniture stupefying. His demeanor, his wives' behavior and condition of the house show weakling state of Urdu.

The novelist artistically draws readers' attention towards bilingual scene and changing cultural dynamics in the post-partition India. The novel also records Hindi-Urdu controversy of 90's. It reveals how politics and religion are connected to language. Devan is refused leave from the college to interview a Muslim man and is advised to cast Muslim though off the department he is working in. Failure to shun the idea will drag him to transfer Devan was threatened. His sympathies for Muslims and Muslims ideas are deemed to have adverse influence on the Hindu learners. Devan's thought of interviewing is deemed an act of disloyalty to the nation by Hindus. It will be tantamount to treason. (Desai) Moreover, friendship between Devan and Murad is meant to bridge the gap between Hindi and Urdu and Hindus and Muslims. It must stand for the mutual existence between the two cultures. But the deceptive behavior of Murad leads to disintegration of the two languages and two cultures. Murad's scarred face and loathsome for Hindi metaphorically means scarred Urdu as a language as he is its representative. But contrary to this, a Hindi lecturer is conferred with the

custody to preserve the last shreds of Urdu. Politics of the language is shown in the failure of tape recorder to record the poet which is failure on the part of the state to take concrete measures to preserve the language thereby the project of preserving the language is mishandled inviting hopelessness.

After the partition most of Urdu medium institutes were shut down. Hindi was installed instead of Urdu. Pre-partition it was Urdu language around. It was on the lips of poets and layman. Nur is the representative of the world of greatest Urdu poets and Devan symbolizes Urdu admirers who dreamed to hear the poets of the time and be in their company. The novelist expresses her longing for the language, for the people who flourished in India. Since there is no audience yearning for Urdu, enjoying the company of poets there will be no writers and no speaker in the language. Modern world which is characterized with material needs. Devan despite his love and passion for the language has undertaken teaching Hindi as it is the language which offers prospective. It is the language for his survival as it has listeners and readers. Devan's character can be taken as Anita Desai standing herself who despite her longing for Urdu language and Urdu culture has chosen English as vehicle to verbalize her longing for the glory of the language lost.

Macaulay gave English culture to the sub-continent in the cloak of English. He did it with the intent to wipe out local languages and cultures. English culture which created rift between the two powerful cultures that of Islamic and Hindu is performing the job of preserving Urdu language and culture through reverse engineering. Using English as a reversing tool Desai is bringing to highlight ethos and pathos of Urdu language and Urdu culture which suffered severely and went on getting thin in India after the partition due to the hostility between Hindus and Muslims. The novelist has presented characters from diverse backgrounds both Hindus and Muslims. Making Devan custodian of Urdu she is trying to bind the gap between the two cultures. So English is used to infuse life in Urdu and give voice to prevailing weaker position of Urdu in India.

In conclusion it can be asserted that language shapes human beings, creates groups and assigns them identity. It is the concrete tool and representation of our ideologies. With it human beings show solidarity with a group and represent it. It bifurcates and unites and the group members or social actors show affiliation and represent them. Urdu Language which enjoy sublime status in the subcontinent and enjoy privileged position especially during Mughal rule and pre-partition has been reduced to a status of minority language. English language has also its share in its declined status, but it is the language which has become voice of its ethos and pathos in Desai's novel.

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