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SHAHJAHANABAD: TWO IMAGES

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ABSTRACT

Shahjahanabad has been a contested site culturally, historically and geographically. Not surprising, therefore, that the literary expressions engaging with this disputed space have had to work their way through many negotiations and contradictions. 'Culture' has figured centrally in all discourses arising in and from this space in all senses of the term as Shahjahanabad has boasted of a heady and unique "way of life", refined and stylised material and non-material culture and trail blazing artistic accomplishments. While Krishna Sobti's *Dil-o-danish* (The Heart has its Reasons) recaptures this unique way of life, Anita Desai's *In Custody* chronicles its demise. Through a study of these texts, it is possible to foreground both the cultural practices embedded in them as well as the material conditions which have produced them. Offering valuable insight into the rise and fall of this culture, the texts also highlight how city and culture figure predominantly in the entangled matrix of factors influencing complex human social behaviour. Both the texts illustrate how the matrix of urbanism and culture shape and influence the lives of city-zens. The present study combines inputs from literary studies, cultural studies, urban studies and memory studies to document how living in Shahjahananbad has catalysed in various periods of its history the act and quality of writing and how the conditions of living in the city in general and Delhi in particular shape the narrative which partly or wholly, explicitly or implicitly, constitutes an imaginative and cognitive audit of the give and take between the city and the city-zen.

Shahjahanabad has been a contested site culturally, historically and geographically. Not surprising, therefore, that the literary expressions engaging with this disputed space have had to work their way through many negotiations and contradictions. 'Culture' has figured centrally in all discourses arising in and from this space in all senses of the term as Shahjahanabad (alternatively referred to as 'Dilli' and post-independence, 'Old Delhi') has boasted of a heady and unique "way of life", refined and stylised material and non-material culture and trail blazing artistic accomplishments. While Krishna Sobti's *Dil-o-danish* (The Heart has its Reasons) recaptures this unique way of life, Anita Desai's *In Custody* chronicles its demise. Through a study of these texts, it is possible to foreground both the cultural practices embedded in them as well as the material conditions which have produced them. Literary analysis is a rewarding technique in cultural sociology as in attempting to understand the impact of relationships in totality on human behaviour, cultural sociology now primarily includes cultural and urban alongside economic, political, historical, geographical, and psychological

relationships. In order to unravel human behaviour in society, cultural sociology focuses on groups to which individuals belong. While the biggest group is society itself, there are smaller groups as well and city and culture figure significantly among them. Thus, cultural sociology is interested in examining not just the characteristics of a particular culture but also how it figures in the entangled matrix of factors influencing complex human social behaviour. Both the texts illustrate how the matrix of urbanism and culture shape and influence the lives of city-zens.

Borrowing from Gilbert Ryle's philosophy of "thick description", Clifford Geertz introduced the method in anthropological and sociological practice. This method entails explaining with as much detail as possible the reason behind human actions. Since human actions can be construed variously, so Geertz insists that all codas of meaning creation along with the variety of meanings created should be foregrounded in research and inquiry of human social behaviour. Literary texts already embody this kind of "thick description" which Geertz calls into play for anthropological and sociological analysis. A literary text is traditionally known to interweave the many "webs of significances" in which human life remains suspended. (Geertz, 1973:5) Culture constitutes an affective "web of significance" and is an integral part of the act as well as the fact of a literary creation. Also, as Geertz points out, the culture of a people is "an ensemble of texts" and can be best decoded through practices of close literary reading and writing. (Geertz, 1973a:452) While there is this conceptual reciprocity between culture and literary text, there is an additional merit in retrieving cultural practices from literary texts. As Sacvan Berkovitch writes,

> The literary text simultaneously engages, embraces, and disclaims the rules that frame the rhetorics of culture, and it does so in precisely the area, language, that bears the most responsibility for the ways in which we understand the world. We can extend our counterdisciplinary outlook, accordingly, to the rhetorics from which it came, from which it's made, and through which it speaks. (Berkovitch, 84)

A literary text not only helps us navigate the "disparate but interlinked" areas of human life but it also enables us to put into perspective the limitations of a simple sociological, anthropological or disciplinary approach to what Berkovitch refers to as the "game of culture" which is as complex and maverick as a game of chess. (Berkovitch, 84) The game of culture requires to be reconceived and reset often, beyond and across systemic or disciplinary barriers- a possibility which distinctly exists in literary texts. The two texts mentioned above figure seminally in the literary discourse on Delhi culture. Through these texts, a Cultural Studies scholar can begin to observe how living in Shahjahanabad catalyses the act and quality of writing. The conditions of living in the city in general and Shahjahanabad in particular shape the narrative which partly or wholly, explicitly or implicitly, constitutes an imaginative and cognitive document on the give and take between the city and the city-zen. It examines how the rules of the game of culture in Delhi have been revisited and revised time and again to stand as they do when these two writers undertake to write Shahajahanabad. However, each intervention in this game, whether literary or otherwise, adds to the direction and dimension of the game and hence, each text matters not only as an individual move but also as a serial link in the chain. Culture and culture of a city is the uninterrupted story of each move, game, sets, series, so on and so forth in totality- a story which commences in literary terms with the three texts examined here.

Krishna Sobti was born in Gujarat (West Punjab, now in Pakistan). Popularly referred to as the grand old dame of Hindi fiction, she has been writing for more than fifty years now. *Daar Se Bicchudi* (1958), *Mitro Marjani* (1966), *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* (1972), *Zindaginama* (1979), *Ai Ladki* (1991), *DiloDanish* (1993) and *Samay Sargam* (2000) are some of her major works. Some of her well known stories are 'Nafisa', 'Sikka Badal Gaya', and 'Badlon Ke Ghere'. Sobti has also produced *Tin Pahad* and *Yaaron Ke Yaar* (1968) – two very different works but published in a single binding. *Sobti Ek Sohbat* (1989) is an anthology of excerpts from her selected works. Krishna Sobti also writes as her alter ego- Hashmat. Her compilation of pen portraits of fellow writers and friends is called *Ham Hashmat*. *Dilo-Danish* (1993), translated in English as *The Heart Has Its Reasons* (2005), is a narrative set in the Dilli of the 1920s. An illicit relationship between Vakil Kripanarayan, a

scion of an affluent Kayasth family of established lawyers, and Mehak Bano, a client's daughter, threatens to tear apart the joint family system and traditions of a conservative society. The blurb on the English translation of the novel states, "Set in the Dilli of the 1920s, Mehak and Kripanarayan's love story threatens the seams of family and passion, as Kutumb the wife gropes for the slivers of a broken marriage". (Sobti, 1993, 2005: back cover) The Mehak, Kripanarayan and Kutumb triangle at various levels is the eternal triangle. One can very well say that in essence, man-woman relationships are still fraught with the same tensions and individuals are still subject to the same power structures, although the outward manifestations are different. At another level, it is a product of the cultural conditions of a patriarchal and enclosed society. The joint family system accords a position of power to the man. In the patriarchal joint family system, absolute power is vested in the head of the family who is unquestionable on account of his gender as well as money. The 'Haveli' Charburzi, the palatial abode of Kripanarayan's clan, as an edifice, symbolises the patriarchal power. Kripanarayan is happy that there are no individual staircases to the rooms of family members as common passages and entrances ensure the concentration and consolidation of power in a single source. The metanarrative of the joint family cannot, however, conceal the abounding conflicts within the Haveli which are caused by varying degree of access to the chief font of power and intrigues which are caused by attempts to secure greater proximity to this font of power. Kripanarayan, as the privileged male head, assumes with perfect equanimity and complacency that adultery should be granted to a man in the name of variety if the wife's interests within the house are being taken care of and also that the mistress should not presume equality and should be content with whatever favours are being done to her in return of her 'services' to the master. While Kutumb fights it out guilelessly with the all powerful male head of the family, others like Chhunna are shrewd to acknowledge the political economy of the joint family and thus accept her brother's relationship with much fanfare to continue to derive benefits from her alliance with him. The Haveli does its best to acculturate Kutumb into feigned ignorance and indifference but she refuses to ignore her husband's indulgence as a man's natural right and predilection. She sulks, argues, resists and resorts to black magic to claim back her husband and erase the slight to her person and esteem.

Another cultural institution which impinges on the triangle is that of the courtesan. Mehak's mother, Nasim Bano, is a courtesan and is robbed of her sanity and riches by a Nawab Sahib. The taint of prostitution as well as poverty continues to haunt Mehak who becomes a vulnerable victim to an apparently suave and well meaning lover, Kripanarayan, who, however, is no different from her mother's tormenter in depriving her of dignity, equality and security. Mehak has to surrender both her body and wealth to the Vakil Sahab. Unlike Kutumb, the lawfully wedded wife who is vociferous in her complaints against Kripanarayan, Mehak the mistress cloaks her resentment in witty repartees, seductive mannerisms and cautiously worded pleas for the welfare of the children born out of this wedlock as she knows that her survival depends on keeping Kripanarayan in good humour. Kripanarayan, with his legal and patriarchal mind, exploits her for her dependence on him. What Kripanarayan euphemises as grace and tranquillity in Mehak are actually concessions she is compelled to make on account of her compromised economic and legal status. Through the food imagery of leftovers of meals, Kripanarayan makes it evident that he thinks of women as objects of consumption. Mehak to him is like sweets which can be eaten as leftovers but "leftovers are not eaten for their own sake". The 'illicit' tag thus confines her forever in a watertight category. The courtesan culture determines her identity as an object of pleasure. She must keep the man entertained with her seductive sexuality, something which is neither desired nor expected in the well bred wife. Kripanarayan, who Mehak calls a *rasik* (epicurean), enjoys the ghazal hummed by Mehak, and entreats her to teach music to their daughter Masooma. Mehak is appalled by the idea because while it is simply music and heritage for Kripanarayan, it carries for her a stigma which she does not wish to transmit to her daughter. Thus, her past and present are constantly at odds and it is a battle for her to walk the tight rope between "*ghar*" (home) and "*gharana*" (legacy). She is doomed to be the 'other' in domestic and legal terms. The children also suffer from the same duality. Badru and Masooma both agonise over their status of the 'outsiders' in the Haveli. They are

swayed so much by the dazzle of the Haveli, which represents an influential, legitimate and resourceful paternity, that they desert their long suffering mother for it.

The culture of this society institutionalises exploitation of the woman through legitimisation of differences on the basis of caste, religion, rituals and customs also. Kripanarayan belongs to the Kayastha community which is reputed for its intellectual, professional and cultural accomplishments. From the traditional profession as the King's and the nobility's scribes, it had a meteoric rise in terms of power and property. They were among the first communities to display the same initiative in adopting western modes of living and education as they showed in adopting the Islamic modes earlier. Thus, law was one of the many professions on which they left an early mark during the British rule. They have traditionally shared close culinary and cultural affinity with the Muslims on account of their longstanding association with the Muslim rulers of India. Yet, Mehak is discriminated against on caste and religious grounds and her children are derided as the offspring of a 'Musalmani'. Similarly, rituals and customs at birth, birthdays, marriages, and numerous other social occasions, highlight differences in the position of women. The lawfully wedded wife, the mistress, the 'Musalmani', the young widow, the old mother widow, the widow living in her dead husband's house, the widow living in her maternal house, the remarried widow, the well settled and well married daughters, the poor suffering daughters, daughters who do not have a right to property but who need to be compensated for it through gifts on various occasions are the many categories extant in society according to which treatment is meted out to women. The expression of this difference is primarily economic. Money, in this way, also serves as the most effective instrument of control. The gifts which Mehak receives at the birth of her children are paltry and the jewellery which she possesses is also penny-ante in comparison to Kutumb's overflowing coffers. The locality in which Mehak and her children live, Farashkhana, is a locality where people with limited means live. It is in stark contrast to Haveli Charburzi which faces the Fort and has "huge courtyards and fountains and four imposing pillars". (Sobti, 1993, 2005: 22) In hierarchically arranged Shahjahanabad, closeness to the fort indicated both political influence and material affluence. The interiors of the house also speak of austerity. This frugality pronounces her status as a consort and the inferior status of her children. Kripanarayan feels discomfited at the mean fare at the disposal of Mehak and the children. His uneasiness is more out of the negative reflection it has on his own status, rather than the deprivation it signifies for Mehak and her children. When he wants to make amends by marrying off Masooma in a well to do respectable house, even then he cares less for what it will mean to Mehak and more for quietening his own conscience. Kripanarayan knows that real power is economic power and thus, while he attempts to keep Kutumb's aggression sedated by satisfying her lust for jewellery, he keeps Mehak's defiance and desertion in check by controlling her family heirlooms of jewellery. In fact, jewellery becomes the objective co-relative of a woman's respectability and acceptability through its give and take. Mehak attempts to reclaim her identity and dignity by reclaiming her family jewels but she loses her children, the father of her children and her right to the 'charity' of the Haveli in her bid to claim economic independence. She finds power and respect with money but an assertive woman is a threat to the self effacing ideals of womanhood and motherhood in the patriarchal society. Kripanarayan similarly dismisses Kutumb's assertions of her economic and legal right as unwarranted bickering on Kutumb's part.

The cultural conditions of the society which engender the dramatic collisions in this narrative go deeper than the simple and superficial markers which dot the topography of its landscape. Writes Nilanjana Roy:

> Austen's England and Sobti's Dilli have much in common: what drives the interplay of relationships and the emotions is, in the final analysis, just the hard facts of property and ownership. Marriages were about property in Austen's world; sometimes the bride brought wealth, sometimes she married wealth, sometimes she was little more than property herself, to be bought and sold and settled without her consent. *Dil-o-Danish* is about what happens when women, and men, question the norms that apply to property and relationships (Roy, 2005)

Though the Dilli of 1920s is often equated to the backdrop of Ghantewala Halwai, Chandni Chowk, Chawri bazaar and Farashkhana in the novel, yet as one delves deeper the novel raises other questions about the cultural identity of the city of this time. Ahmad Ali's Dilli in *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) is also of the same period. There are several similarities as well as differences. Ali's Dilli is Muslim Dilli and the way of life is markedly Muslim. Sobti's Dilli is cosmopolitan in the sense that characters from both the communities share narrative space. The Kripanarayan-Mehak relationship is a Hindu-Muslim relationship but the tension caused therein does not arise from religion. Kripanarayan says that Kayasths are not Brahmins that they will be repulsed by Muslims. According to the Puranas, Kayasthas have descended from Chitragupta Maharaj, the god who records the deeds of humanity and decides their outcome for determining which human being will go to heaven and which to hell after death. The word *kayastha* means "scribe" in Sanskrit, referring to the caste's traditional profession of record-keeping and administration. Kayasthas worship *qalam* and *dawaat* (pen and ink-pot). This clearly shows that they were document writers and keepers for the kings. Kayasthas were in demand in the second millennia in most kingdoms and princely states of South Asia. Their identity was more of a community rather than a caste because they were united by professional expertise in Persian (the state language in Islamic India), Turkish, Arabic, economics, administration and taxation. This spurred their promotion well past the Brahmins who confined their study only to Sanskrit. They quickly adapted themselves to the Islamic rule and later to the British rule. Their secular viewpoint and lifestyle was an asset to themselves and to the kings. Kayasthas were appointed in highest government offices as ministers and advisors in early medieval Indian kingdoms and the Mughal Empire. They held important administrative positions during the British Raj also. They learnt English and sent their children to England for education. They rose to become civil servants, tax officers, junior administrators, teachers, legal helpers and barristers. There is a Kayastha Muslim community also constituted by descendants of members of the Kayasth caste who converted to Islam during the rule of Muslim dynasties generally known as Siddiqui Kayasths. The close association of Kayasthas with the Muslim rulers led to the conversion of members of this community to Islam. It is interesting that Sobti trains her focus on this community. It has risen more as a community than a caste by virtue of merit more than heredity, talent more than tradition, adaptability more than fixity and fusion more than puritanism. It is almost a bridge between the Hindus and Muslims and the Ruler and the Ruled in India. The large estate which Kripanarayan bequeaths to his dependants testifies to the wealth this cerebral community has amassed. The culinary culture, the patronage to the arts, the keenness for an English education, allowing the widow Chhunna to work and remarry, treating wine as Devi's *prasada*- all spell an unidirectional approach to lead a rich and rewarding life. Thus, Sobti's Dilli, with the Kayastha community at the centre, fills in for the conspicuously absent cosmopolitan counterpart of Ahmed Ali's exclusively Islamic Dilli in *Twilight in Delhi*.

Amitabha Bagchi wonders that while great cities like New York, Paris, London and even Mumbai have inspired great writing, Delhi seems to lack "the masterwork that captures this city in a grand and tender sweep". He conjectures that can this void mean that Delhi is not a great city or not a loved city? Trying to establish a tradition of the Delhi novel, he writes that, "Another underrated contender for the Great Delhi Novel is Krishna Sobti's *Dil-o-Danish* (translated into English as *The Heart Has Its Reasons*)" and he cites the following grounds for its candidature:

> Written with an assurance that can come only from the pen of a mature writer at the height of her powers, *Dil-o-Danish* avoids the pitfall of nostalgia to which most historical fiction set in Delhi succumbs. Its claim to being the canonical narrative of this city is made explicit only in a moving set of paragraphs right in the end, and in the cover of the original Hindi hardback from Rajkamal Prakashan: a line drawing of the view from one of Jama Masjid's minarets. It may well be that of the time described in *Dil-o-Danish* there is a particular story to be told, a set of narratives that walks backwards down Chandni Chowk doing sijdah to the Fort as it goes.

It is not just the last few paragraphs where Dilli is explicitly mentioned and the line drawing appended to the Rajkamal Publication that Dilli exists in the novel. While depicting the Dilli way of life (which in Ahmad Ali's

Twilght in Delhi is the same as the Muslim way of life) is at the very core of the novel's political and thematic purpose, in Sobti's *The Heart has its Reasons*, the Dilli way of life, despite playing second fiddle to a "universal theme" or Sobti's social and psychological realism, is closely enmeshed in the warp and weft of the novel's fabric. Havelis, mehfils, mushairas, ikkas on the streets, newly erected electric street lights, bustle on the streets of Chandni chowk, "stunningly feminine Ghata Masjid"(Sobti, 1993, 2005: 45), "parrots, pigeons, partridges, muniya, the throngs at Jama Masjid", kite flying, picnics at Qutub Minar are some of the landmarks which come alive on the panoramic vista of the novel. The bounteous products available on its streets range from colourful quilts, emeralds, pearls, brocades in Dariba, diamonds at Netrachand jeweller, shawls from Hukumtani's shop, stationary at Raghbardayal Bishandayal shop. Culinary delights are similarly in plenty. Gajrela, til laddoos, gajak rewri, dry fruits are winter's offerings. Nankhatais from Badshah Bulle and Hashim, quail and partridge from Jama Masjid, mutton and rotis from Shahjahanpuri, paranthas from parathewali gali, Ghantewala Halwai's motichoor laddoos, malai laddoos, baadaam barfi, pista lauj, rasmalai and pethe ke angoor, fruits and panjiri from Moti Bazar, namkeen from Abdullah's, murabbas and aam paapar. The sounds of azaan in *Twilight* are replaced by the bells of Gaurishankar temple. The ghazal and Urdu poetry are equally popular in both the novels.

Kripanarayan's zest for life has often been noted and has been attributed to his creator's fierce and feisty celebration of life in all her works. Sobti's amoral approach to "human" instincts like love, sex, appetite, freedom has often invited controversy and criticism. However, whether one terms Kripanarayan's career in the novel hedonist or sanguine, it is linked to his life in Dilli. He credits the farsightedness of his ancestors of having purchased property in Dilli so that his family could partake in this urban experience. (Sobti, 1993: 2005: 214) He is grateful to Dilli for his family's flourishing legal practice. The Haveli is his identity and all his choices in life are guided by the 'honour' attached to his lineage. As the patriarchal head of his family and an elite member of the Dilli society, he realises that "The family's ways and traditions must be kept" (Sobti, 1993: 2005: 214). His forays outside the Haveli create momentary conflict in him but even Mehak knows that he will never cross the threshold of decorum. (Sobti, 1993: 2005:18) He does eventually retrace back his steps in conformity with his position as a respectable householder and citizen in Dilli society. The streets of Dilli are full of temptations and Kripanarayan succumbs to them. The raging passion for the material pleasures of life is cradled in the consumerist paradise which exists in the urban economy. Both Mir Nihal of *Twilight* and Kripanarayan do not have to slog much for a living. While Mir Nihal has the pretensions of a depleted aristocracy, Kripanarayan has the leisure and privilege available to the noveaux riche of the emerging middle classes. Kripanarayan's ancestors have made enough money to purchase Kothi Kilamukh from the bankrupt aristocracy. Kothi Kilamukh is Begam Samru's Haveli which stood in full glory facing the Fort. The urban lifestyle, steeped in luxurious products produced by the labour inside and outside the city to capitalise on the disposable income of people like Kripanarayan, both produces and sustains this gluttonous disposition.

The gluttonous disposition extends to women as well. The women in this society hardly share in the abundance which is spread out in every nook and corner of Dilli. Kripanarayan is very emphatic in his insistence that God made woman to keep house and that a man's activities outside the house are part and parcel of her destiny. While restraint, abstinence, frigidity, contentment and compromise are the gold standards for a "good" woman, any transgression makes them liable to be stigmatised in the family and society. The women at home are not supposed to have an appetite for the sensual feast and the women in the brothel are supposed to quench that appetite. Women in the novel struggle against their status as persona non grata in the male world of unlimited carnal joys. Kripanarayan is annoyed by Kutumb's infringement on his "natural" enjoyments because cloistered in the "zenana", Kutumb cannot figure out the world of the sensual delights but Kutumb turns tables on him by stepping out of the natural world into the supernatural world. Chhunna also resents the asceticism imposed on her and with her indomitable spirit, manages to break free of the repressive stranglehold of the double standards of self serving patriarchal society. Mehak's resistance is implicit in wielding her sexuality as a weapon, but when respectability clashes with sexuality and undermines

her identity as a mother, she resorts to the great equalizer and greater weapon- money. Women in Ahmad Ali's *Twilight* suffer far greater claustrophobic confinement on account of the *purdah*. Trivialities rule their lives. Extramarital relations literally drive women insane. Asghar's apathy to his artless wife leads to her death. However, the urge to avenge their miseries found in Sobti's women is absent in Ali's women characters who are metaphorically and physically blind to their conditions. We can attribute this difference to the feminist streak in the novelist or her empathetic capability to flesh out the silences of these invisible women but it can also be attributed to the socio-cultural attitudes of the upwardly mobile Kayastha family and the stasis ridden Muslim household. The Muslim community was on the defensive due its wrested power. Despite women's issues beginning to appear in the self reformist discourse of the community, these do not, as yet, seem to dent the ground reality perceptible in Ali's depiction. On the contrary, keeping the household sealed and women sealed within it was thought to be essential for countering the osmotic pressures of foreign cultures. Sobti's women fight to be liberated and the gender conflict has a potency which is missing from the inert tribulations of Muslim women.

Sobti's Dilli, however, does not betray even a trace of the cataclysmic events which were occurring in its surroundings. Ahmad Ali's Dilli registers events like the Darbar, the demonstrations, and the cultural invasion but Sobti's Dilli seems to be in a permanent time warp. The Dilli of the 1920s was the Capital of the British Empire, Lutyen's Delhi was in the making during this time and the nationalist movement was entering its Gandhian phase. Civil Lines is mentioned in the novel as one of the characters Chhail Bihari is in the process of purchasing property there but all these events evoke neither direct nor tacit comment from the characters. Mir Nihal is mortally stricken by the foreign political and cultural invasion but there does not seem to be any such paranoia in the world of this novel. Does it once again have to do with the self assurance of a community which is politically, economically and culturally malleable? The family here belongs to the strata which has hardly ever held power but which has always benefitted from power. Thus, since transitions of power do not impact its fortunes, life continues in its well worn groove and is one unabated shower of plenty. Both Mir Nihal and Kripanarayan traverse from youth to old age, from vigour to debility and from life to death. Both the novels have dying protagonists but their ends are as different as their lives. As he drifts from life to death, he makes Chhunna relive the evening of Masooma's wedding which is both traumatic and climactic for him. He is surrounded by his family and is able to meet Mehak also in his last moments. His heart is warmed when he sees his eldest son Rajjo ready to walk into his footsteps. He is bid farewell to with respect and deference due to the head of family and a successful man of the world. The heady smell of old liquor and the aroma of delectable food being cooked by Chhunna wafts in the air. The life of copious comforts lived by Kripanarayan gets distilled in bottles of *itrs* (perfumes) which he begins to smell in the twilight zone between consciousness and unconsciousness and mortality and eternity. Not only do the exotic *itrs* made by the wizardly *attars* (perfumerers) of Dariba capture the essence of his own life but also the "very essence of Chandni Chowk". (Sobti, 1993, 2005: 210) As he is beckoned by Shyam Dada to a "great time... in the open skies" (Sobti, 1993, 2005: 211) after a brief interregnum of darkness, he is ready to "move on" as he knows that

> ... life's reckoning is not death, but movement and transformation inherent in the ceaseless dance of creation. And though all is same, down to the rituals and traditions that we follow on births and deaths, birthdays, anniversaries, festivals and weddings, life throbs each day anew in this haveli of mine. Yes, life is movement, not stagnation, it lies not merely in wallowing luxury but in bettering the family's wealth and status. (Sobti, 1993, 2005: 213)

Life for him is a continuum not only from the point of view of the Hindu doctrine of reincarnation and transmigration but also from the worldly perspective of an unbroken chain of family ideals and assets. It is this belief in continuity which inspires Kripanarayan to seek the same fortune for the city as it is linked to the fortune of his family. He says, "I know after I am gone I will still wander the streets of Dilli".(Sobti, 1993,2005: 220) The noisy racket of Dilli's people, cool summer evenings, ominous dark monsoon clouds, bustling streets, *paan* (betel) from rasiya Banarasi, confections from Ghantewala Halwai, *mushairas* at Mission College

comprise the "taste and romance" of this city. He wants to continue to savour it through his sons and grandsons. Singing paeans to the city which gives with both hands he says,

> From the shores of Jumnaji emerged this city, changing shape over the centuries, inviting, luring all, but always making them her own; nurturing them with her body and soul as one would one's children. May god grant that Dilli may never become barren and desolate; may she always reign supreme, her wonders and brilliance intact. May the loving gaze of her myriad inhabitants continue to roam her streets. (Sobti, 1993, 2005: 220)

Though unvanquished politically and geographically, the city has undergone a sea change from the 1920s to the 1990s when the novel was published. Sobti has seen the building of Lutyen's Delhi, the partition of India, cultural transitions with the influx of Punjabi refugee population, establishment of the Indian governmental institutions, emergency imposed by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the commencement of economic liberalisation. In *Ham Hashmat* (1977), she recreates the emergence of the coffee house culture. Cannaught Place was the jewel in Delhi's crown. It was the meeting ground for friends, poets, minds and interests. She documents how people from other parts of India were gravitating to Delhi and making a mark on its political, bureaucratic and literary horizons. Thus, apart from the Punjabi culture which was on the ascendance, another cult or culture was also in the making- the power culture. For someone who is such a sensitive index of change, to have frozen culture like a picture frame in a temporal mould is rather surprising. It is a case of cultural recall like Ahmad Ali but with a difference. Ahmad Ali, writing in the 1920s about a way of life which is all but gone, is pitted against the colonial onslaught on political and cultural autonomy of the native. However, when Krishna Sobti evokes this culture, colonialism is a thing of the past, India has achieved independence and the colonial legacy has been subsumed within the new power and urban structures in Delhi. Delhi has rewritten its culture with 'Old Delhi' confined to what increasingly became a business district and the new becoming a megalopolis in which cultures not only from all over India but all over the globe converged to produce a multicultural ethos. In the 1990s, India has been through the first attempts at economic liberalisation in 1966 and then in 1985 by Rajeev Gandhi. Though Rajeev Gandhi's measures were cut short abruptly by his assassination in 1991, yet he was successful in his brief stint to usher in a revolution in information and communication technology. In 1991, the government of P. V. Narasimha Rao and finance minister Manmohan Singh initiated breakthrough reforms. These neo-liberal policies revolved around opening of international trade and investment, deregulation, initiation of privatisation, tax reforms, and inflation-controlling measures. When the political, economic and cultural climate has so drastically altered, then what bearing does Sobti's Dilli of the 1920s has on her personal memory and the collective memory of the city? It is only by unravelling this mystery that we can determine the nature of the cultural recall present in this novel.

Speaking to Reema Anand, the English translator of *Dil-o Danish*, Krishna Sobti underscores her relationship with historical events of her times thus:

> Besides Partition and migration, which form the backdrop of most of your stories, what are the other sources?
>
> My generation was not a bystander. It was caught up in historical events like Independence after a long struggle and a great divide. History was chasing our subcontinent with tension and conflicts leading to unprecedented violence and migration. It was difficult to forget Partition; dangerous to remember it. (Sobti, 2013)

Krishna Sobti has dealt with partition in several stories but the most eminent work is her Sahitya Academy award winning novel *Zindaginaama*. As has been noted by Brigit Paul in her thesis on Krishna Sobti, her mode of dealing with it was very different from the literature of dislocation which this earth shattering event produced. (Paul, 2004) In *Zindaginama*, Sobti's vivid recollection of a life and people with deep roots in their native soil reaping rich fruits of their labour is a tribute to the pre partition Punjab between 1905 and 1915. It is a Punjab which was uninterrupted yet in its economy and culture by colonial forces and which was alien to religious and communal separatism which was planted in its soil by the power driven imperialists and which

eventually became the bane of thousands of innocent individuals who lost their homes, identities and cultures in the upheaval of partition. This throwback in memory is Sobti's technique of remembering and not remembering the partition at the same time. The same technique can be seen in *The Heart has its Reasons* where the slice of Dilli life has been served in all its ravishing glory. About Delhi culture, Sobti says:

> It has been a cliché among Hindi-speakers to say "Delhi has no culture". This is because the generation of immigrants born post-Independence never really got a full sense of the city they had moved to, and instead idealised their native villages. Also, many people associate Delhi's culture with Punjabi culture, which is only part of the story. Urdu poets used to know about the unique romance of Delhi, but this is largely lost to Hindi speakers. I hope today's youngsters, who have lived their whole lives in the city, will have a chance to rediscover its culture and history, and put it into words. (Sobti, 2008)

While the immigrants suffered irreparable loss, Delhi also suffered from great loss first at the hands of the British and then, the hordes of refugees touching base here in the partition exodus. It ended up becoming what it is sometimes called- the *bahurupiya shahar* or the trickster city. A *bahurupiya* is a clown-entertainer who is forever changing its guise and disguise to have no fixed identity. As "it's hard to capture a city that is constantly reinventing itself, a city always Under Construction", hence it is more practical to capture its antithesis- the city as it was, before the days of reinvention and reconstruction. Bringing us back to where we began, the elusive nature of a Delhi novel, says Nilanjana Roy,

> Part of this is what might be called the Great Washington Novel conundrum: there are great writers from Washington, but no iconic fiction to match the great New York novels. Nayantara Sahgal chronicled political Delhi in novels like *Rich Like Us* and *A Situation in New Delhi*, but it is hard to pull off truly great writing about administrative capitals—it's like pulling off the great oil novel, as Amitav Ghosh once remarked. It is theoretically possible, but it doesn't happen that often. (Roy, 2014)

And when it does happen, as in the case of *The Heart has its Reasons*, the cultural recall becomes a favoured instrument of expression and it serves the purpose of a political comment on the colonial project, validation of self as participant and not bystander in the tumultuous events and a chastisement to the uprooted and rerooted populace of the metropolis who connect with the city physically but smirk at it culturally.

Anita Desai's *In Custody*, on the other hand, brings out images of a Delhi, which antithetically to Krishna Sobti's Dilli, mirrors the debacle of this high culture. While Shahjahanabad has become Old Delhi post independence and partition, the legacies of the wiped out dynasty stick out like befuddled pebbles on a riverbed from where the river has changed its course. *In Custod*y has a Delhi which tests the endurance and fecundity of individuals and cultures by subjecting them to a whirlwind of cataclysmic change. Nur, his house, his poetry and his predicament are all reminders of how en masse political, demographic and consequent, cultural change can be excruciating in many different ways. Shahjahanabad has always been a site of cultural change. Most simply, culture can be assumed to be forever changing. Since culture is a sum total of learned patterns of behavior and ideas (beliefs, attitudes, values and ideals) characteristic to a particular populace, these patterns are improvised, shed and replaced as human needs and conditions change. Culture can also change when new discoveries and inventions present themselves as alternatives or improvements to existing practices. However, not all societies are equally receptive. Those which are more receptive are seen to be progressive societies while those which are reluctant are called conservative societies. Why societies are inherently different in this regard cannot be explained by any generalization, yet strong socio-economic communities are thought to be more innovative. At points and times between two different cultures, cultural diffusion is a spontaneous process though borrowing of traits is selective and assimilative. In case of unequal relations between the two cultures in contact, extensive cultural conversion in the subordinate culture to comply and conform (acculturation) is an adaptive strategy for survival. Like biological adaptation, the cultures in which maladaptive traits abound tend to die, while those which are able to incorporate adaptive traits

adequately and quickly survive. Revolutions are regarded to be the most unsettling of all changes as there is a violent replacement of one cultural ethos by another. Shahjahanabad has seen it all. Despite being home to natural cultural refinement and evolution, creation of composite culture from Hindu and Muslim contact, interference by imperialist Christian powers and adaptive responses to colonization, it is caught off-guard by the violent revolution which engulfs it in the form of independence and partition.

Writes Thomas Krafft,

> After the demise of the Mughal Empire and the quelling of the uprising of 1857 the third decisive hiatus in the development of Shahjahanabad/ Old Delhi was Independence and the subsequent partition of the subcontinent.
>
> The bloody interchanges between the religious groups, the mass exodus of large portions of the Muslim population, the still greater influx of refugees from Punjab and the rapid growth of Delhi in the following period caused a radical break from the existing structures. In many quarters of the Walled City an almost complete exchange of population took place. In this respect and with reference to their political and economic influence, we must speak of the marginalisation of the Muslim portion of the population. (Krafft, 1993: 93)

Tracing the transformation of Shahjahanabad to what is today called 'Old Delhi', Krafft outlines the major forces and factors which fuelled this transition. The population of the walled city jumped from an estimated 170,000 to 380,000 between 1941 and 1951 and peaked to 400,000 in 1961. Thousands of houses changed ownership through mostly illegal takeovers and allocation of "evacuee" properties to refugees by the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation. As far as the Muslim population was concerned, the upper and middle strata left for Pakistan. Only the economically and educationally backward segment stayed behind. Thus, it was a cakewalk for the robust and literate Punjabi migrants from Pakistan to establish economic and demographic dominance in the area. By 1958, 74.5% enterprises operating in Old Delhi were those that were founded after Partition. Buildings available in Old Delhi were put to commercial use. Old Delhi emerged as the hub of wholesale trade owing to these new enterprises spanning over more than 20 commodity groups like textiles, grain, construction material, hardware, iron, electronic goods, paper, dry fruit, spices, vehicle and motor parts. Demand for sales and storage space quadrupled leading to the encroachment of commercial ventures into residential spaces. The trend continued as trade enterprises based in this area multiplied sevenfold and manufacturing units tripled between 1961 and 1981. Residential buildings continued to get converted to showrooms, workshops and warehouses. Prices of realty boomed with this escalation in demand and both due to incentive offered by high realty prices and deteriorating civic conditions, the residents of this area continued to move out to more habitable neighbourhoods. Residents were soon outnumbered by the workforce that was employed in these enterprises. After 1980, even wealthy and well-built *mahallas* like Katra Neel fell prey to commercial infiltration. Writes Krafft,

> Originally commercial use was almost entirely confined to the principal lane of the *mahallah*. Today shops and godowns seem to be everywhere. New shops were constructed even in small by-lanes and a few cul-de-sacs can be found that are restricted to housing only. The majority of the residents when interviewed claimed that the traditional mahallah structure was being destroyed by growing commercialisation. The influx of goods and non-residents into the even most remote side lanes changed the character of this originally semi-private space. For the residents this results in a loss of identification with their neighbourhood as well as a general decline in housing quality. (Krafft, 1993: 109)

Due to mammoth increase in textile trade, demand for space spiraled and extraordinarily high prices began to be paid to induce residents to shift out of this area. Between 1961 and 1981, a loss of 40% resident population was recorded by DDA registers. Interviews and field studies in DDA planning zones A-16 to A-24 revealed that while Hindus, Jains and Sikhs were quick to shift out, Muslims showed a tendency towards "residential persistence". (Krafft, 1993:111) Muslims cited cultural identity and security as the predominant reasons for

continuing to live in the Old Delhi area. While middle classes shifted out to the New Delhi, only those who could not afford to buy property, high rent rates and travel fare remained in the area. This led to a qualitative degradation of residential quarters. The highest migration rate was found to be in the age group ranging from 20 to 40 as the breaking up of extended family and community living bonds was responsible for driving out the newly married householders who chose to set up establishments in more upmarket urban areas. According to a 1980 report, the majority of the population (75%) living in the walled city belonged to the economically weaker section, most households (73%) consisted of single room tenements and about two-thirds of the houses were rented. The Delhi Rent Control Act of 1958 also contributed to the buildings' state of disrepair as it allowed old tenants to continue paying very low rates and also made it impossible to evict underpaying old tenants. This led to a resource crunch which made the owners reluctant about investing in the upkeep of the buildings.

It is against this backdrop that the story of Nur in *In Custody* has been wrought. Nur recollects a Delhi when

> ...Delhi was like a shining tapestry- not the thick quilt of smoke and fumes it is now. The air was as brilliant as a piece of silk, the sun sparkled upon it like a huge pendant fashioned by a jeweller ... even with only two rupees in my pocket, I was a rich man then. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 173)

In contrast to this radiance and prosperity, the picture which Nur's house and neighborhood presents after 30 years of independence is dismal. As Deven enters this "pullulating honeycomb of commerce" (Desai, 1984, 2007: 33) to seek an interview with Nur, he observes that

> If it had not been for the colour and the noise, Chandni Chowk might have been a bazaar encountered in a nightmare; it was so like a maze from which he could find no exit, in which he wandered between the peeling, stained walls of office buildings, the overflowing counters of shops and stalls, wondering if the urchin sent to lead him through it was not actually a malevolent imp leading him to his irrevocable disappearance in the reeking heart of the bazaar. The heat and crowds pressed down from above all sides, solid and suffocating s sleep. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 32)

The nightmarish, surreal, psychedelic quality is accentuated as Deven walks past an ill-assorted pastiche of things and people like lurid Japanese sarees, nets of gold and silver embroidery looking like flashy but shimmering prostitutes, pyramids of crystallised fruit, milk steaming and bubbling in drowsy pans, evil smelling shops of herbal medicines, booths of astrologers, palmists and soothsayers with illustrated scrolls, mynah birds and gemstones spread out in front, pavement stalls of scarves, underwear, glasses and enamel plates followed by silversmiths and jewelry shops. A near accident with a rickshaw, a narrow lane lined with gutters and refuse, an overflowing blocked gutter, a humped bull munching a paper bag from an open dustbin and a row of small, high green wall of an ayurvedic hospital which barred any sunlight from entering in the area on one side and tightly shut wooden doors set into straight, faded walls on the other marked the narrow alley in which Nur's house was located. The arrival of evening only added to this phantasmagoric feel. In the evening,

> ... the white hot sky became blotched with the city's soot and faded to grey and then to mauve and finally to an uneasy disturbed darkness. It could not become wholly dark because then the shops and cinema houses and restaurants and the streets of the bazaar below lit up for the night and the sky was tinged sporadically red and orange and yellow and violet, like an old hag at a fair crazily dancing a dance of seven veils. The noises of the street and its traffic intensified as well and through the steady rumble coiled and uncoiled the long steely loops of song blaring out of a cinema house at the end of the street. The rooftop did not really raise one above the din of the streets; it was as if they were inside a balloon, floating above but remaining enclosed. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 48)

The house which is hired for tape recording Nur's memoirs close to Nur's own house turns out to be a brothel where Nur is said to have found his second wife, Imtiaz Bibi. Nur's companions now are "lafangas of

the bazaar world- shopkeepers, clerks, bookies and unemployed parasites". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 49) They speak an unrefined language "as if they belonged to a world of hectic activity on the fringes of art and creativity". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 49) It is not just these louts of the bazaar who feed like parasites on Nur's poetic genius living "out the fantasy of being poets, artists and bohemians" on his terrace evening after evening, but also Imtiaz Bibi who manipulates and apes the poet in a bid to fulfill her own poetic pretensions and aspirations. His beloved language Urdu has also come a long way. From the lived and lilting lingua franca of the commoner, the poet and the king, it has got reduced to the language of the 'minority community', identified with Islam and relegated to Urdu departments or publications. Nur says to Deven,

> How can there be Urdu poetry where there is no Urdu language left? It is dead, finished. The defeat of the Moghuls by the British threw a noose over its head, and the defeat of the British by the Hindiwallahs tightened it. So you see its corpse lying here, waiting to be buried. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 39)

Urdu poetry is as much endangered as the Urdu language. The much admired and appreciated metaphor and melody has not only had to negotiate with modernity but also had to compete with Hindi. In the process, the familiar genres and themes seem to have lost their relevance and have demanded the evolution of a contemporary poet and a contemporary audience. The debate on Nur's rooftop about the past, present and future of Urdu language and poetry is heated but hollow because it is just that, a facile debate lacking earnestness and initiative. Nur reprimands his companions by saying

> You recite verses as if they were nursery rhymes your mother had composed. I tell you, we must get over this rolling of Urdu verses into little sugar pills for babies to suck. We need the roar of lions, or the boom of cannon, so that we can march upon these Hindiwallahs and make them run. Let them see the power of Urdu. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 52)

A little later Nur sums up the daily debate between "the India camp and the Pakistan camp, the pure- Persian camp and the demotic-Hindustani camp" by saying

> Wrong, wrong for thirty years you have been wrong. It is not a matter of Pakistan and Hindustan, of Hindi and Urdu. It is not even a matter of history. It is time you should be speaking of ... it is all we really know in our hearts. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 53)

Whereas the debate is an idle pastime and pompous verbosity for Nur's companions, for Nur it traces a personal and poetic calamity, yet he finds himself quite inadequate in dealing with it. The inadequacy has partly to do with the scale and speed of change and partly with languor and lethargy of a dissolute life style which is difficult to shake off. Nur has experienced the precipitous fall from the heyday of a integrated culture and community to the post independence and post partition reality where that way of life is no more than a tattered rag flailing against the restructured urban and cultural identity of Delhi. The ravages of time is a stock theme of Urdu poetry and the pathos of what Nur has gone through, he can best express in his wonted symbol and style but Nur realises that in the era of polarised and political war of languages, poetry cannot weep, it has to roar. The comfortable time when Urdu poetry existed in the realm of aesthetics and not politics had passed for it in India. Despite bitter battles being fought in the political and cultural spheres of the Indian sub-continent, Urdu poetry, with the arrogance and confidence of the language of the rulers, persisted in the politically neutral decadent art-for-art-sake formula. Steeped in the tradition of Urdu poetry, Deven makes an estimation of the greatness of these poets:

> ...they could distance events and emotions, place them where perspective made it possible to view things clearly and calmly. He realised that he loved poetry not because it made things immediate but because it removed them to a position where they became bearable. That is what Nur's verse did- placed frightening and inexplicable experiences like time and death at a point where they could be seen and studied, in safety. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 54)

This has been the habit of Urdu poetry. Theoretically Nur argues that it needs to be jettisoned but to break through the torpor which has engulfed the community and launch onto a constructive and corrective course is

easier said than done. It is tied to an entire habit of the mind and injecting new blood into the indolent mindset of the community is a tall order impossible to accomplish. Says Nur, "This sifting and selecting from the debris of our lives? It can't be done, my friend, it can't be done, I learnt that long ago". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 189) An altered urban, linguistic and political ethos has left Nur baffled and paralysed. He is used to an aristocratic way of life where language and art were one among the many material pleasures of life. Deven expects Nur to be living in hermetic dignity away from any foibles or failings. He is dismayed by the evening soirees of hoi-polloi on his terrace, his interest in wrestling and *akhadas* on the banks of river Yamuna, his appetite for rich foods and liquor despite being afflicted by piles and the control which his two wives have over him. What he calls the "soiled, discoloured and odorous rags of his life" (Desai, 1984, 2007: 189) are in fact the legacies of his ancestral tradition. Nur thinks of Deven as the custodian of his poetry and yet he thwarts his attempts as he cannot give up the whimsical and temperamental tantrums of the spoilt, the rich and the powerful. He neither attempts to control his rabble rousing companions and quarrelsome wives nor does he attempt to adapt to technology. This self destructive conditioning of the Muslim populace is mirrored in the condition of Deven's colleague, Siddiqui, the lone member of the Urdu department of Lala Ram Lal College in Mirpore. Siddiqui is a distant relative of nawab from Delhi who has fled during the mutiny to settle down in the relatively safe confines of this town. His house tells the tale of the Muslim aristocracy which has steadily declined from prosperity to paralysis. Even within the dilapidated house, Siddiqui keeps up the pretence and lifestyle of a "grand landowner, a man of leisure and plenty". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 150) The sordid reality of "the advanced state of decay" is inscribed all around him and yet, he lives in a make belief world "as if all were still in order, still functioning in another, more opulent age". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 151) The pattern at his house is startlingly repetitive for Deven when he visits Siddiqui as Siddiqui seems to be hopelessly addicted to hedonistic pleasures like wine, rich food, gambling, musical soirees and indiscrete choice of company. Siddiqui also possesses Nur's talent "for remaking fact into more acceptable, more attractive fiction." (Desai, 1984, 2007: 152)

The retarded and contorted response of the Muslim gentry in the face of sweeping sea change of circumstances results in the feeling of alienation which decapacitates Nur and his ilk even further. Nur finds that the conditions of existence have been transformed so much beyond recognition that along with once familiar lifestyle and relationships, the once familiar poetic idiom and ideas have also become bizzare and absurd. Pigeons, once tame and friendly, have now become audacious enough to physically assault the poet on his terrace for grains. All he can do is to lament, "Who would have thought that one day the bird, the symbol of flight and song, would cease to be a poet's inspiration and become a threat?" (Desai, 1984, 2007: 46) Thus, Nur finds himself robbed of his tongue twice. The toppled and crumbled *weltanschauung* of the poet gives birth to the sense of alienation in the poet. Alienation is defined as an emptiness stemming from "the expectancy or probability held by the individual that his own behaviour cannot determine the occurrence of the outcomes, or reinforcements, he seeks." (Seeman, 1971: 135) In other words, as Kalekin-Fishman (1996: 97) says, "A person suffers from alienation in the form of 'powerlessness' when she is conscious of the gap between what she would like to do and what she feels capable of doing". The psycho-analyst sociologist Rotter (1966) associates alienation with the missing co-relation between internal control and external locus of control, that is, indeterminacy of the degree to which success or failure is a matter of external factors (e.g. luck, chance, contacts), as against success or failure being dependent on individual skills or character. A natural corollary of this sense of powerlessness is a sense of meaninglessness which can be understood as "the individual's sense of understanding events in which he is engaged. (Seeman, 1959: 786) Thus, where powerlessness refers to the sensed inability to control outcomes, meaninglessness refers to the sensed inability to predict outcomes. Seeman argues that since living in an intelligible world is a prerequisite to expectancies for control, hence a traditional *weltanschauung* gives the security of being in control while a rapidly transforming one gives a nauseating feel of things whirring out of control. (Seeman, 1959) The malaise is compounded by the void of normlessness (or what Durkheim refers to as anomie) "denoting the situation in

which the social norms regulating individual conduct have broken down or are no longer effective as rules for behaviour". This produces an inability to identify with the dominant values of society. Seeman adds that this aspect can manifest in a particularly negative manner, "The anomic situation [...] may be defined as one in which there is a high expectancy that socially unapproved behaviours are required to achieve given goals". (Seeman, 1959: 788) Neal & Collas (2000: 122) write, "Normlessness derives partly from conditions of complexity and conflict in which individuals become unclear about the composition and enforcement of social norms. Sudden and abrupt changes occur in life conditions, and the norms that usually operate may no longer seem adequate as guidelines for conduct".

Nur comes across as an alienated individual. His powerlessness is evident in the despair and defeat he seems to have accepted about the future of Urdu, his poetry and his community in India. He sees very little hope of Urdu being revitalised by the debates on his rooftop or the efforts of people like Murad or Deven or university departments. He calls himself the corpse of the language, waiting to be buried. He can only see suffering stretched out in front of him and the release from the suffering can come only through death. He allows himself to be persuaded by Deven to electronically document his poetry but the strain caused on him by this strange procedure is so much that he abandons the project by saying

> ... let me go to I have waiting for me- six feet of earth in the cemetery by the mosque. ... No, I will not resume. All one can resume, at my age, is the primordial sleep. I am going to curl up on my bed like a child in its mother's womb and I shall sleep, shall wait for sleep to come. (Desai, 1984, 2007: 191)

The meaninglessness experienced by him is writ large in his verses which express vacuity, absurdity and adversity in life.

> Life is no more than a funeral procession winding
> towards the grave,
> Its small joys and flowers of funeral wreaths ... (21)
> Many sins, and much suffering; such is the pattern
> Fate has traced on my tablet, with blood ... (41)
> My body no more than a reed pen cut by the sword's
> tip,
> Useless and dry till dipped in the ink of life's blood. (42)
> Night ends, dawn breaks, and sorrow reappears,
> Addressing us in the morning light with a cock's shrill crow. (66)

The demise of the "*tahzeeb*" or refined, courtly behaviour on which he has been brought up has accelerated his cracking up into a senile and mercurial personality. Deven is puzzled by Nur's odd behaviour on several occasions as it not only belies his expectations of Nur as a poet but even as a civil and courteous human being. Nur lashes out at Deven for disturbing his siesta by saying "Fool, are you a fool". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 35) He mocks, rebukes and pokes Deven. He is indiscriminate in the company he keeps. He eats and drinks much in excess of his delicate health. He allows himself to petition for money to Deven. He makes inordinate demands on him during tape recording. He digresses from one topic to another without yielding much literary output. If the disappearance of the social mores he is accustomed to is a predominant cause of his dysfunctional gentility, the shifts in gender and marital roles also contribute to his impaired judgement about propriety. His second wife is a shrew who wants to cure him not only of his degenerate ways but also of any illusions he might be having of being a great poet. The rise of the woman contender in the male bastion confounds his sanity further. Deven cannot fathom what could have compelled Nur to agree to Imtiaz Bibi's preposterous demand of organising a *mushaira* for her in the house. Nur flounders from situation to situation because in his transitioning society where norms of behaviour are in a dizzy state of flux, the conviction or courage to resist or enforce is not easy to retain. Nur's is a case of shrinking space as his infringed claim to the status of the insider leaves him confined to a reclusive corner. The centre has become the corner. Any attempt to possess,

claim, preserve or retain space in kaleidoscopic landscape of this changing and expanding Delhi leads to a sense of loss and alienation.

This Delhi in the throes of utterly chaotic churning has opposite effects on the 'insider' and the 'outsider'. Deven is treated like an outsider by Nur who loathes his entry into his house, his language, his culture and his life. Though he calls Deven to be the custodian of his verses in a moment of euphoric optimism, yet he hardly bequeaths any nuggets of his tradition to him. Deven is an outsider on account of being a Hindu, a Hindi speaking and teaching person, a non-resident of Delhi and an earner of bread for his family instead of a poet dedicated to the service of Urdu language. Nur's relationship with his space collides and converges with Deven's own relationships to form grotesque socio-psychic spatial patterns. On his home turf in Mirpore, Deven finds himself irrevocably trapped in antitheses like Urdu vs. Hindi, poetry vs. profession, responsibility vs. freedom, material vs. intellectual. His stasis also stems from another overarching antithesis- Mirpore vs. Delhi. While Mirpore stands for the drudgery of daily life with its formlessness and monotony, Delhi, in his imagination and aspiration, stands for elevating intellectual and vocational pursuits. Deven considers the very short geographical distance between Delhi and Mirpore unbridgeable as Mirpore's "solidity and stubbornness had formed a trap" and thus this distance "became for him the impassable desert that lay between him and the capital with its lost treasures of friendship, entertainment, attractions and opportunities". (Desai, 1984, 2007: 17-18) When the opportunity to visit Nur in Old Delhi arises, it is to him "the summons for which he had been waiting all these years". It is to be a visit that would "haul him up from the level on which he existed- mean, disordered and hopeless- into another higher sphere." He expects himself to be "sloughing off and casting away the meanness and dross of his past existence and steadily approaching a new and wondrously illuminated era." Though his first brush with Old Delhi is nightmarish in which idealised notions clash with unsettling reality, yet the encounter helps him incorporate a corrective vision in his world view which is akin to discovery and acceptance of the adjusted self unlike the steady dissipation and alienation of Nur. As he leaves the poet in his wife's captivity and his poetry desecrated in vomit, he concludes simplistically

> Dawn and poetry he thought ... all that was simply not real, not true; it was humbug, hypocrisy and not to be trusted. If it were true then it would have stood the test of actual experience, and it had not. Oh, it had not, it had not. Henceforth, he would avoid that mirage, that dream that so easily twisted into nightmare. Any reality was preferable ... (Desai, 1984, 2007: 64)

With this cynical repudiation of poetry in favour of 'reality', Deven sets up yet another antithesis to afflict himself with.

His subsequent encounters, however, plunge him deeper into the human experience, and he ambles with questions like "What's it all about" and "What is it all for" echoing in his mind on the roads of Delhi. He shuns the familiarity of Nur's house and Raj's aunt's house to sit in the detached anonymity of a city park. He finds himself contemplating the serene geometrical patterns of the *chaharbagh* style park and the majesty and enormity of Jama Masjid visible from the park. The eternity and serenity of these classic monuments is like a silent resolution of all his conflicts. He reaches an epiphany of self discovery sitting in the park. He understands that in the existential condition of mankind, the mere mechanics of survival interfere with the autonomous, ineffable perfection of art but in this moment of epiphany, he is able to extricate art from all the unnecessary juxtapositions he had thrust it in out of his ignorance- mandane/ exotic, domesticity/ creativity, profession/ vocation, trap/ liberation, Delhi/ Mirpore:

> Deven recalled, incongruously enough, the conversation in the canteen with Jayadev, how they had envied their scientist colleagues who had at their command the discipline of mathematics, of geometry, in which every question has an answer and every problem its solution. If art, if poetry, could be made to submit their answers, not merely to contain them within perfect unblemished shapes but to release them and make them available, then- he thought, then-
> But then the bubble would be breached and burst, and it would no longer be perfect. And if it were not perfect, and constant, then it would all have been for nothing, it would be nothing.

When he reaches Mirpore, catastrophe stares in his face and though the novel ends as he runs away or towards it, he can see his two significant relationships- with his wife and with Nur- independent of each other with tragic lucidity. The Delhi outsider comes back not with feelings of powerlessness, meaninglessness and normlessness but with greater control and clarity. This is because Deven is more adaptive and less traumatised by the sudden disappearance of traditional cultural loci. He makes efforts to alleviate his misery and boredom and adopts official and technological means to fulfil his duty towards his ideal. He is not paralysed or confounded by the topsy-turvy nature of things. Rather, his experience has a calming and enlightening effect on him. He is no less a victim of existential conflict as Nur is but his struggle has tragic dignity. Thus, Anita Desai's *In Custody* portrays a scooped up cultural space which can be both devastating and uplifting, but is a tragic reality for the populace trapped buried under the debris of a collapsed culture.

City is integrally related to these products of culture as in trying to make sense of the past and present, these products write and highlight dominant symbols, practices, inclusions, techniques, genres, meanings and identities which are embraced or rejected at crossroads of culture. The city, in itself, as an organisation and as an economy, is a terminus for engendering and imposing particular kind of cultural roles on individuals. (Katznelson, 1993) These cultural recollections and ruminations not only borrow from the already existing tropes in the collective memory of a culture but also add to it. (Erll, 2008: 2-3) These recollections and retellings therefore function like cultural biographies assessing the mutual impact the individual and the city have on each other and also of documenting how public and private practices of memory unfold in city specific cultural productions. (Eakin, 1985; 1992) Cultural production is also the interpretive grid to understand the shifting boundaries of public and private, past and present, signification and erasure, affiliation and disowning and harmony and conflict. ('Proceedings of the Memory Studies Thematic Workshop Zentrum Moderner Orient', n.d.) City and the human mind have much in common and hence narratives of self like autobiographies inevitably present the city-ness which they encounter. (Pile, 2002) Space always accosts the body and the mind in a variety of ways. While recollecting and retelling we go in reverse gear to enter, re-enter, dismantle or improvise those spaces. Thus, the hybrid city existing in between the real and the memory city is an important cultural document. (Pizzi, 2011: 1) Krishna Sobti's *Dil-o-danish* and Anita Desai's *In Custody* present Shahjahanbad as the hybrid city between existence and extinction.

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