CHAPTER - VII

IN CUSTODY

Art as Discovery

The status of art and artists is another important concern in the modernist works of James Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* and to a certain extent in D. H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*. This concern has been taken up by Anita Desai also, to a limited extent in *Voices in the City* - in the case of Amla and Dharma. In *In Custody* (1984) however, this concern has been projected as the main theme. While *Voices in the City* traces the impact of the city on the artistic growth of artists, *In Custody* portrays the reaching of artistic maturity of the protagonist by his understanding and realisation of the true nature of art.

Jasbir Jain also observes that “the novel is about the nature of art”². S. Indira comments that the novel “deals with the issues of language and poetry ...”³. However, she also views “the theme of imprisonment and release”⁴ to be another theme. But it is to be noted that feelings of imprisonment and release are felt by the protagonist in his search for understanding the true nature of art. As such, this has not been treated as a theme here. This study has taken up as the main theme here the understanding of the true nature of art by the protagonist.
Deven Sharma, the novel's protagonist, seeks to escape from the harsh realities of life by seeking relief in a fantasy world of art. Through many trials, he finally realises the futility of having a fantasy-related conception of art for in reality, art and life are inseparable.

Deven – "an insignificant and gullible nobody" (27) – is a lecturer in Hindi working on a temporary basis in a private college of a small town, Mirpore. Leading a monotonous and purposeless life, Deven's only achievement so far has been failure – both as a teacher and as someone who had aspired to some status in life. Even his marriage has a permanent quality of despair because of his wife's unfulfilled aspirations and his own perpetual inability to rise above his unsatisfactory condition.

The only bright spot in his otherwise gloomy life is his love for art or more specifically for Urdu poetry. Unable to change his gloomy circumstances, Deven takes refuge in occasional writings in Urdu which lead him to fantasize about "sudden wealth, unexpected cheques" as well as "acceptance in the literary circles of the metropolis" (12).

Deven's fantasy appears to change to reality when his childhood friend, Murad, approaches and persuades him to do an article on Nur Shahjehanabadi – once a famous symbol of Urdu literature – now no longer active.

Doubt and trepidation over his own efficacy overcome Deven when he sets out to interview Nur. How these feeling so overcome him about meeting at last his childhood 'hero' is revealed in their first
meeting. As the door is opened, Nur bellows out in a “cracked and hoarse and thorny” voice enquiring, “Who is it that disturbs the sleep of the aged at this hour of the afternoon that is given to rest? It can only be a great fool. Fool, are you a fool?”(38) The extent of Deven’s adulation is revealed now. After hearing the poet’s voice, Deven so forgets himself as to acknowledge the fact that he is a ‘fool’. As Deven is asked to be brought up by the poet, he feels radiant and wonders if this was not the “summons”(39) he had always been waiting for. Deven has high expectations about this meeting which would surely lift him from his “mean, disordered and hopeless” existence into another – that of “poetry, beauty and illumination”(40). In actuality, Nur – the epitome of success – represents for Deven all that he fantasizes to be but could not be. In the interview that Deven hopes to have with Nur, he – in reality – wants to experience his much longed for fame through poetry as against his own gloomy existence.

Unfortunately Nur is already too old and has lost much of his creativity. Deven, however, in his blind adulation of the poet and in his need to experience literary glory and greatness through him refuses to accept this fact. Viney Kirpal also expresses a similar view when he says:

To be a success has always been an anxiety with Deven, and the meeting with Nur ... represents for Deven all that he could not be. Nur, in that sense, is Deven’s alter ego."
Deven’s romantic visions of the poet is soon shattered by his stay and encounter with the poet’s private life. Initially, Deven enjoys a “miraculous intimacy”(45) with Nur when he joyfully hears the poet’s voice quoting poetry. Deven joins him in quoting back Nur’s poetry and this binds them in an exquisite “web, an alliance”(203). This intimacy is rudely intruded upon by the arrival of Nur’s servant-boy followed by several “loutish”(46) young men. Their audacious ribaldry shocks Deven but he finds Nur to be unmindful of it. In fact, he is amazed to see Nur in the centre of those “lafangas of the bazaar world” who “lived out the fantasy of being poets, artists and bohemians...” in the company of Nur(50). What is further shocking to Deven is the sight of Nur himself, greedily stuffing himself with biryani, kebabs, korma, dal and drinks. His hopes of a dialogue about poetry in the midst of such “garishness”(50) not only dwindle dismally, it also seems to appear quite “grotesque”(50).

Deven’s fantasy world of Nur living surrounded by “elderly, sage and dignified litterateurs entirely alone, in divine isolation”(51) comes crashing down when he finds instead “clowns and jokers and jugglers”(51) surrounding Nur. This only serves to fill Deven with disillusionment which reaches its peak when he finds his hero, Nur, in a very undignified position, “face downwards, arms and legs spreadeagled across the thick mattress” on the floor(58). This reality is in sharp contrast to Deven’s earlier visualisation of Nur as a “god”(39) upon hearing his words.
A huddled and whimpering Nur has to face the venomous contempt of his second wife, Imtiaz Begum while Deven is compelled by her to clear up Nur’s vomit with some papers she throws at him. Thoroughly shaken and shattered by this sordid episode Deven abandons the poet and runs back home to Mirpore. However, before his departure, after he drops the “sopping bundle of paper”(61) into the gutter, realization dawns on him that those very papers which he had thrown away might have been inscribed with Nur’s verse. This is indicative of the fact that art is not separable from life but instead constitutes the very stuff of life. As Viney Kirpal rightly says, “Art is both the poem and the poet’s vomit” and “it was only as Deven was trying to discard the soiled sheets that he realized that they could have been Nur’s poems”. Art constitutes not just Nur’s poetry but it encompasses his sordid life also. This realisation is of course, still at the nascent stage subconsciously and erupts into Deven’s consciousness much later.

Back home, his bitter experience makes him face upto reality for once and just this time he doesn’t resent his circumstances. But it appears that his visit to Nur has started a chain of events from which Deven cannot extricate himself. Taking advantage of Deven’s love for both Nur and Urdu poetry, Deven is manipulated very subtly by Nur himself. This is done firstly, by Nur renewing his interest in the interview and secondly, by expressing his willingness to recite his poetry, both old
and new. Nur therefore writes to Deven asking him to come to Delhi and work as his secretary.

This time Deven's visit to Nur's house coincides with the birthday of Imtiaz Begum who is celebrating it by a recital of poems. In fact, she sings the very verses she had learnt from Nur – imitating and parodying his skills.

Seeing her dressed no better than a "prostitute or dancing girl"(83) and becoming the centre of attraction with her "raucous singing"(81), Deven is angered to see the mockery that she has made of art. The revered Nur is "silent, ignored and uncelebrated"(82) and this makes Deven wonder why he had allowed this performance to take place in his – a poet's – house.

The angry Nur tells Deven about his personal life and the slow weaning away from Nur of his house, audience, friends and jewels by Imtiaz Begum. He then proceeds to curse her in the "most filthy terms he could assemble with his slurred speech and sodden memory"(87). This angry outburst shocks Deven as it was neither a fit subject nor the worthy language of a poet. Once again, the reality of life is contrasted with the fantasy world of art. Nur the poet's melodious verses are a shocking contrast to Nur the man's filthy abuse. Deven had always held poetry to be superior to reality but Nur's dark room reeking of "filthy abuse, rotten gums, raw liquor, too many years and too much impotent rage"(87) shatters his very concepts about poetry.
The sudden entry of an exhausted, enraged Imtiaz Begum and her words further adds insult to the idolatory concept of poetry held by Deven. Whereas poetry had been exalted by Deven and Nur, Imtiaz Begum has used it as a means of earning easy money.

With the entry of Nur's first wife in this volatile situation, Deven, once again flees from Nur's house. From close quarters, Deven finds Nur degenerated into a drunken, complaining, ill-tempered, whining old man while his home and wives appear to be the house of "ferocious felines" who would between themselves "devour the helpless quaking flesh of the poet"(117). Once again, this vision of Nur's personal life suggests the inseparability of art and life. Nur is the poet as well as the drunken, ill-used husband. In the other words, this indicates that creativeness – as suggested by Nur the poet – is found even in uncreative circumstances – as suggested by Nur, the man. This is also not obvious to Deven at that stage.

Nur's bait – of reciting his poems – is able to catch the prey for the thought of the impending interview propels Deven to once again meet Murad who advises him to get a tape-recorder wherein to record both Nur's voice and poetry. The Head of the Urdu Department of Deven's college evinces a keen interest in the proposed interview and helps in sanctioning the tape-recorder to an unbelieving Deven. Once again, he is filled with new hope making him fantasize about the world of poetry. He
consequently feels that finally he has been “allotted a role in life” (105) to capture for posterity Nur’s genius.

Unfortunately, Deven is again deceived by Murad who without prior consultation arranges a defective second-hand tape recorder to be purchased. He also arranges without Deven’s consent, for a totally inexperienced boy to be Deven’s technical assistant. Finally, when Deven goes to Nur’s house to fix the time and place for the interview, he finds Nur highly dejected over Imtiaz Begum’s illness. At the same time, Imtiaz Begum categorically and emphatically prohibits Nur from reciting his poetry for recording. Now that every attempt of his proves futile, Deven is overcome by feelings of inadequacy, inconfidence and incompetence. But with the college’s sanction, it becomes too late for Deven to withdraw and so he accepts Nur’s uncouth first wife’s offer to arrange – in return for payment – the tape-recording outside the house.

Even though, further funds are arranged from the college for Deven, he becomes highly disillusioned and no longer knows if he wants to be helped any further in the project. In fact, the sordid revelations about Nur and his family causes doubt to invade in. Nevertheless, Deven sets out for the tape-recording sessions feeling a kind of “hazardous euphoria” (150) – “hazardous” as both doubt and enthusiasm plague him and “euphoric” because of the opportunity of re-living his fantasy.

Contrary to these high expectations, the recording sessions turn out to be a fiasco. Nur, surrounded by his loutish companions is
temperamental and garrulous, talking mostly about food and drink – *biryani* and rum and rarely about poetry. It is only once or twice that he throws in a line of poetry in between his rambling. It is in recording this, that Deven slowly faces a predicament, that the matter was indeed not a “simple one of separating prose from poetry, life from art” (155). At times, when Nur relates ordinary meaningless facts about his loves or quarrels, his youth, education and travels, it makes Deven suddenly aware that these had some bearing after all on Nur’s art. Yet, Deven still finds it difficult to believe that art is also related to life. Hence, the ribald comments of Nur’s companious of having found his second wife in a brothel – incidentally the very building of their recording sessions – makes Deven wonder in despair:

> In taking Nur’s art into his hands, did he have to gather up the stained, soiled, discoloured and odorous rags of his life as well? (158)

Thus, Deven’s dilemma is how to sift Nur’s art from his life for Deven wants to record the life and poetry of Nur – the creator of poetry – excluding Nur – the man with his sordid family life. Viney Kripal has rightly said:

> As one trying to record Nur’s life and poetry, he wants only the poet, the creator, purged of all the dross of his life as a human being. But Nur comes to
him with all the sordidness of his personal life... and his poetry.  
At one such session when Deven appears unable to decide what to record and what to omit, Nur unexpectedly conveys his understanding of this dilemma:

Has this dilemma come to you too then? 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 ...(167).

What Nur wants to convey to Deven is that life and art are inseparable, that the creative is found even in the “debris” of life. As if to prove his point, Nur breaks out into a new verse filling everyone with silent wonder. Nur thus, is the living example of the inseparability of art and life. That Art encompasses all of life is shown symbolically through the recording itself – the recording of Nur’s short and sudden recitations interspersed with his meaningless ramblings as well as the blaring of car horns from below. Deven again, has yet to realise this fully.

Nur suddenly tires of the recording sessions after three weeks and refusing to talk any further abandons Deven. A highly dispirited Deven returns to Mirpore to find the tapes entirely useless for his inefficient assistant had managed to record only the irrelevant portions of Nur’s ramblings and had missed out the rare moments when he had talked of poetry. With his project a total failure Deven now faces the
prospect of dismissal from college for incompetence and misappropriation of funds. With events leading to failure, Deven’s fantasy world of earning fame through poetry is crushed forever.

Visiting Delhi, one last time Deven yearns to question Nur to see if his perusal of Nur’s art had been worthwhile and try to discover what poetry or art was all about.

Viewing the dome of a mosque which rose like a “vast bubble” – “absolutely still, very serene”(192) – Deven finds a “silent answer to his questioning”(192). Deven feels that Art is like that perfect bubble in its purity – “cool, high-minded and remote”. Unlike disciplines like Mathematics and Geometry in which “every question had its answer and every problem its solution”, art cannot be explained away by answers and solutions. In fact if art or poetry were made to “submit their answers” then the perfectness would be lost - the “bubble would be breached and burst, and it would no longer be perfect”(192). In order to be perfect, art has to be “contained within perfect unblemished shapes” for if art is not “perfect and constant” like the dome, it would be reduced to “nothing”. This new perception about art makes Deven realise that art is perfect only because it is unexplainable. Hence, art cannot be questioned or divided into life being fit or unfit for art. Thus, Deven finally realises the inseparability of art and life.

Jasbir Jain also comments on this aspect of art as comprehended by Deven:
Art ... does not explain, does not offer solutions, it is by its very nature a mystery, and a mystery it shall continue to be ... art is art by virtue of being inexplicable.  

She further adds:

Art could be responded to, understood, absorbed, identified with but mystery it would still remain.  

S. Indira also makes a similar observation with regard to Deven. She says that Deven's new awareness and understanding about art makes him "accept" the "mysterious nature of art as something natural and vital to the very nature of art".

Again, Viney Kirpal's views regarding the inseparability of art and life are worth quoting:

... Art cannot be split into life fit for art and life not fit for art. All of life has to go into art ... Life has to be accepted whole, as a package — the creative tangled hopelessly with the uncreative".

Meanwhile, Nur continues to write to Deven asking for money to save his pigeons, the rented room, to make the last pilgrimage to Mecca and so on but Deven doesn't reply. Thinking of his total experience with Nur, Deven tries to re-capture his old idolatry and devotion for Nur. As he ponders over that "strange unexpected unimaginable friendship"(203) with Nur that had been so painful, Deven is overcome by
another important realisation — "in taking somebody into custody, one has also to surrender oneself to the other's custody"\textsuperscript{12}. Thus, every relationship is basically a two-sided commitment:

He had imagined he was taking Nur's poetry into safe custody and not realised that if he was to be custodian of Nur's genius, then Nur would become his custodian and place him in custody too (203).

Viney Kirpal considers this realisation as related with the "central vision of the book and its title, \textit{In Custody}:

... To be merely custodian is to possess without being possessed and is a relationship of power. Both the epigraph and the conclusion of the novel suggest the need to recognize that every true relationship is essentially a two-way commitment, an act of continued responsibility for the other.\textsuperscript{13}

Deven now recalls in memory the reading of Nur's poetry:

... the sound of it softly murmuring in his ears. He had accepted the gift of Nur's poetry and that meant he was custodian of Nur's very soul and spirit. It was a great distinction. He could not deny or abandon that under any pressure(204).

As Nur the artist could not be separated from Nur the man, Deven therefore feels that having taken custody of Nur's art he would
have to take custody of Nur's life too. This “connection” would not break or end even when Nur died. Deven therefore resolves to treat his “alliance” with Nur as an honour and distinction. This acceptance would help him meet the “day... with its calamities”.

Thus, Deven’s realisation of the relationship of art and life helps him to discover an inner strength of mind dispelling his habitual despondency and defeatism. His new vision of art and life removes his earlier vision of fantasy and leads to his growth as an individual.

As in the other novels, Anita Desai has again used the technique of omniscient narration here. This narration is more on the lines of *Bye-Bye Blackbird* and *Clear Light of Day* as they, like this novel, deal more with outward reality as against the intense subjectivity of *Cry, the Peacock* or the pre-dominantly interior-based action of *Fire on the Mountain* and *Where Shall We Go This summer?*

The narrator does not remain entirely impersonal also, as for instance:

The time and the place: these elementary matters were left to Deven to arrange as being within his capabilities. Time and place, these two concerns of all who are born and all who die, these were considered the two fit subjects for the weak and the incompetent.
The first sentence is the narrator's voice informing about the action. The second is the narrator's ironic comment on the first sentence. This comment brings to focus Deven's traits of failure and the irony of the situation.

It is worth noting that the narrator adopts a tone of gentle irony with reference to Deven prior to his interview with Nur. Incidentally, the interview appears to be the climax of Deven's delusions and fantasies. His self-discovery occurs as an aftermath of the interview. An instance of this gentle irony occurs very early in the novel when Murad mentions the name of Nur being sent to the Nobel Prize committee. Deven's hero-worship of Nur convinces him of Nur's worthiness for the prize:

He himself was convinced that one day the response would come from Stockholm and shake the literary world of India to its foundations. He felt it beginning to shake already under his feet. The two o'clock bus ... roared by (17).

Nur's impact of shaking the literary world is ironically juxtaposed with the shaking of the ground caused by the movement of the bus. This juxtaposition is a hint at Deven's blind hero-worship as well as to the fact that Nur the man - inseparable from Nur the poet - is not really worthy of such adulation.

At times, the narrator speaks in his own voice but projects the perspective of the character. For instance:
He turned the roll of paper ... and wondered if that had not been his error – to search always for solace...
Had he had more spirit, more nerve, more desire and ambition then perhaps he would have instead hunted for success, distinction, magic. Perhaps he would have ... published a poon of poetry earned ... a little, even gold bangles for Sarla ...(128).

Here, the first sentence is in the narrator’s voice but the later two reflect Deven’s perspective.

Again, as in the previous novels, characters are revealed by their thought-processes, their points-of-view as well as by the narrator’s voice. For instance, when a disgusted Nur leaves the singing of Imtiaz Begum and goes up with Deven to his room, his words reveal facets of Imtiaz Begum’s character – her cunningness, avarice and her being a “dancer” in a house for dancers – while his filthy abuse of her reveals his own character too – drunken, a visitor to dancing houses, hence, not very high on morals and paradoxically an uncultured side as well.

Again, Deven’s thoughts about his repeated failures reveal his own weak character:

Every effort ... had ended in defeat ... The inherent weakness in his father ... had been passed on to him.
He felt it inside him like an empty hole ... intimidated by its blackness and blankness ...(128)
Unlike the other novels where mechanical time was juxtaposed with inner time—through the recalling of the past or through the use of flash-back—here, the entire action takes place in mechanical time. Inspite of some external action taking place in comparison to the earlier novels, the emphasis on the projection of thought-processes is still present. Hence, the novel can be said to have a psychological structure. The novel has been divided into eleven chapters through which Deven acquires a realistic vision of art in contrast to his earlier deluded concept and in the process attains self-growth. His earlier sense of defeatism is now replaced with confidence in himself to face life with all its “calamities” (204).

There are a few significant symbols that help in the unfolding of theme and action. Nur himself symbolises the inseparability of art and life—the fact that the creative exists even in the wretched. This has already been elaborated.

Nur’s house and room symbolise the wasted powers of the poet. Both have a dark and gloomy aspect to it. For instance, the first time Deven enters it, he finds it in semi-darkness:

... the walls were lined with dark green tiles that added to the shadowy gloom. The few pieces of furniture ... were like objects carved out of this murkiness, heavy and palpable with gloom (40).
Similarly, Nur's pet pigeons symbolise the loutish men who keep him company for food. Just as his pigeons swoop down on him for grain, similarly, the wastrels of Nur's past swoop round him as "looters" and "raiders"(87):

... a flock of pigeons had swooped down ... and blocked his way ... He stood there in the centre ... and the birds not only seethed around him but perched ... on his bald head and hands, furiously scrabbling ... as if they would tear the flesh ... and devour it ... they coated him with their gluttony(47).

As Deven tries to rescue him, Nur surprisingly does not want to be rescued but calls out for grain to be given. This is symbolic of Nur not wishing to rid himself of his loutish companions.

The assault of Nur by these pigeons is contrasted by S. Indira with the ones in the short story *Pigeons at Day Break* where their sight acts as a release:

... in *Pigeons at Day Break*, the beautiful sight of the pigeons spreading out against the sky like "small pearls"(PDB, p 107) catching the brilliance of the morning light releases the old man Mr. Basu from his psychic and environmental oppressions.\(^{14}\)
Finally, the drab town of Mirpore is symbolic of the drab montony of Deven’s life. The picture of Mirpore is one of decadence and neglect:

... shacks of tin and rags ... the roads ... had been periodically laid with tar but the dust beneath was always present ... it managed ... to rise and spread through the town ... a constant presence ... during the monsoon ... it turned to mud ... The citizens ... could not blamed for failing to understand those patriotic songs ... about the soil, the earth. To them it was so palpably dust (19).

Since for Deven, Mirpore appears “not only the entire world since he had no existence outside it but often a cruel trap...”(19), its stagnancy similarly symbolises his life too. Again, the aridity of Deven’s life is symbolised by the tank of Mirpore from which the people both bathed and fetched water:

... there was no water to be seen in it, only a covering layer of bright green scum on which bits of paper rags and flowers rested as on a solid surface. There were wells, too, in which the water was even more successfully concealed.(21).

These stagnant conditions makes the narrator reflect that “Mirpore spared no effort to give an impression of total aridity”(21).
Again, although Mirpore had some kind of "development" due to the presence of schools, colleges, the railway station and the bus terminus, and inspite of being in a "state of perpetual motion"(23) due to its close proximity to Delhi, the "bustle" was strangely "unproductive"

... the yellow sweets were amongst the very few things that were actually manufactured ... there was no construction ... except the daily one of repairing; no growth except in numbers ... other cities, other places ... saw the fruit of all the bustle, leaving the debris ... for Mirpore.

These external unproductive conditions symbolize Deven's own unproductive life. Thus, like the setting of Where Shall We Go This Summer? Anita Desai has made symbolic use of the setting – the town of Mirpore – to mirror the sterility and stagnancy of Deven's life.

Viney Kirpal observes the novelist's use of certain nouns and adjectives to point out this stagnancy and sterility of the town:

Throughout the novel, the nouns and adjectives that occur with almost uninterrupted regularity in the characterization of Mirpore are "debris", "desolation", "empty", "barren", "stagnant", "stale", "blight", "dustbin".15
Unlike the earlier novels but like *Clear Light of Day*, imagery has been used very sparingly in this novel. This is because, in S.Indira’s words:

Her focus is changed ... from the inner world of the individual to the external world of events and its devastating influence on sensitive, average individuals\(^{16}\).

Thus, imagery is very “sparse in keeping with the prosaic, dull life of Deven ...”\(^{17}\).

The dominant image is of a prison. This is suggestive of Deven’s desire to escape the stifling monotony of his life. Deven regards Mirpore as a prison “an indestructible prison from which there was no escape”\(^{(19)}\). Even in his own house, Deven feels himself to be a “trapped animal”\(^{(130)}\). This sense of being imprisoned or entrapped is an inescapable part of his existence for it seems to follow him to Nur’s house also where he feels that Nur too, is similarly entrapped. Whereas “marriage, a family and a job” had placed Deven in a “cage”, Nur’s life—from close quarters was lived in a “kind of zoo” too:

Being an illustrious poet had drawn people to the zoo to come and stare ... Nur had not escaped from his cage ... he was as trapped as Deven was even if his cage was more prominent and attracted more
attention. Still, it was just a cage ... cage, cage.

Trap, trap (131).

When all his attempts at arranging an interview and a tape-recording session with Nur end in failure, his despair makes him view the help offered by others as a means to entrap him further:

Were these people really helping him to succeed in a unique and wonderful enterprise or simply locking him up more and more firmly in a barred trap? And was the trap set by Murad, by Siddiqui or by Nur and his wives? (143)

These images of traps and prison ultimately lead to the final image of “custody” which has been described by Anita Desai herself as:

... an emotional prison, a spiritual prison, not a physical one. It is a word with a double meaning – custody means guardianship, safe keeping as well as imprisonment18.

Thus, Deven’s earlier feelings of being imprisoned by his monotonous drab existence proceeds to a feeling of being imprisoned by his despairing sense of failure and culminates in the feeling of being imprisoned by his mental acceptance of being the custodian or guardian of Nur’s art and life.

A related image to this image of imprisonment and ultimately connected with the image of Nur becoming “his custodian” and
placing him “in custody” too occurs during the first meeting between Deven and Nur. Realising Deven’s all too obvious idolatory of him, Nur perceives him as a possible “victim” – someone who can be taken advantage of:

A wrinkled eyelid moved, like a turtle’s and a small, quick eye peered out at Deven as if at a tasty fly(42). Viney Kirpal makes an appropriate observation with regard to the novel’s technique which helps in projecting the inseparability of art and life:

Throughout the novel, verse – Nur’s or that of the Romantics, Keats and Shelley – is subtly interspersed with descriptions of ordinary day-to-day existence, conflicts and problems.

Another noteworthy feature of the technique used is the liberal use of native Indian words that lend colour to the novel’s atmosphere. Of course, many Indian words occur in each of the novels but the words used in this novel truly lend local colour. Thus Mirpore is a kind of “caravanserai”(22). Sadhu, Murad-bhai, akhadas, the lafangas, tika, hijras, even the famous movie Sholay, janum, guru-shishya, Imtiaz-bibi, tanpura, shamiana, durbar, koel, bul-bul, Aré, hai-hai, chela, su-ra-hi, pipal, neem, gup-shup, puja, Accha, rudra, rasa, paan, kurta, dal, biriyani, puri, pilao, mehfil, tazias, and lungi – these are the words used to create an Indian ambience.
Notes


7. *ibid.*, p 130.


17. ibid., p 196.
